No. 983
Friday
20 Aug. '99

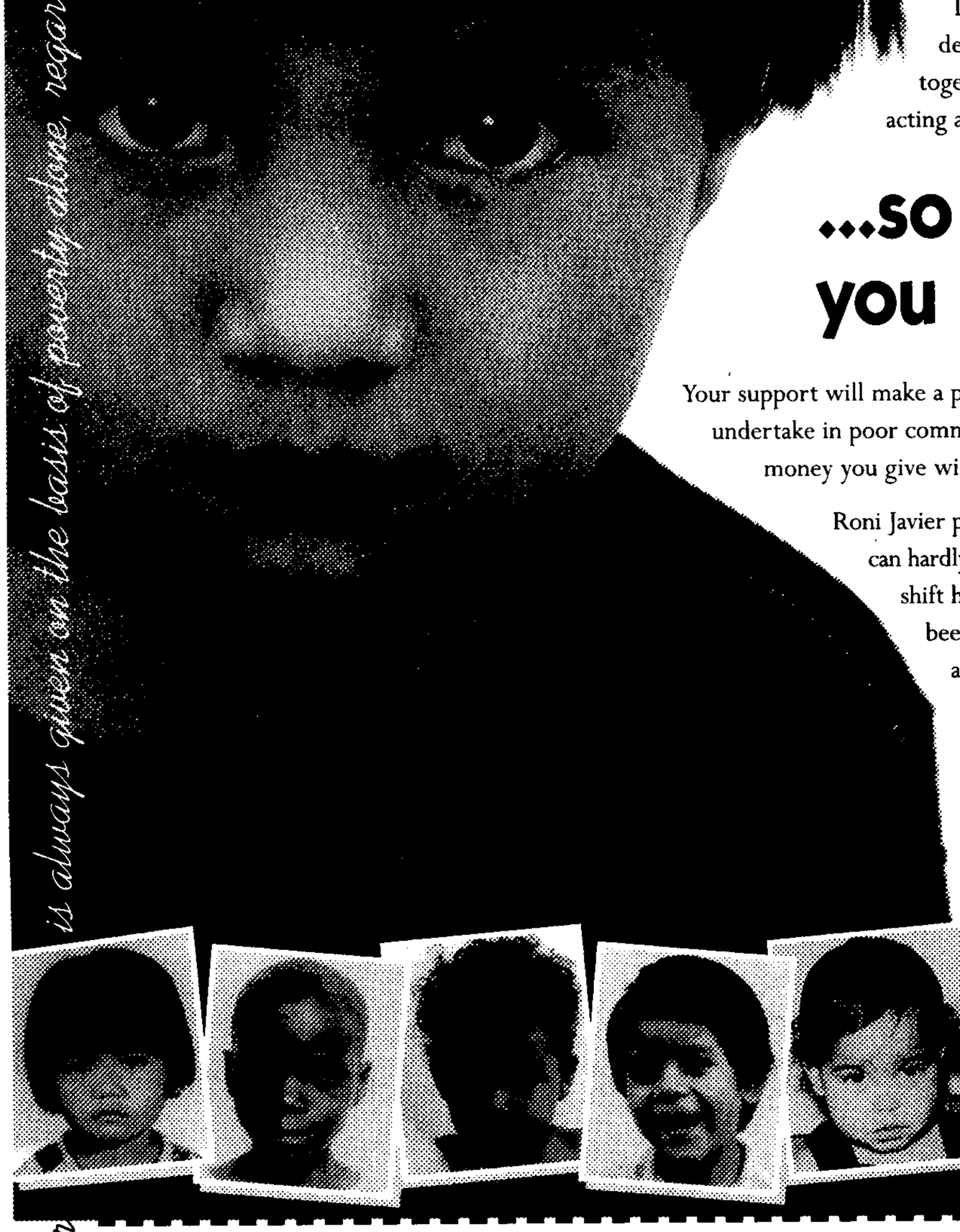
PRIVATE EYE

£1

HAGUE MAKEOVER SHOCK

Christian Children's Fund of Great Britain is a humanitarian, non-denominational registered charity working with locally owned, long-term projects throughout the developing world and Eastern Europe to help bring healthcare, education and eventual self-sufficiency to children and communities in need. Support is always given on the basis of poverty alone, regardless of race, sex or religion

By tonight, another 35,000 children will be lost through hunger, and disease...



It's almost unbelievable, yet every day 35,000 children in developing countries die from malnutrition and preventable diseases. That's more than 24 every minute!

The cause for most of this terrible suffering is poverty. Without enough food, clothing and medical care, let alone a proper education, the future for a child born in poverty is often tragically short. Many die from hunger and disease. Millions more face a daily struggle simply to survive.

Yet all it takes is £15 a month to sponsor a child, bringing real hope into their life and giving both them and their community the chance of a decent future.

It may seem insignificant to sponsor just one of so many desperately needy children, but by doing so you will join together with the many thousands of other like-minded people acting as sponsors through Christian Children's Fund.

...so why do we ask you to help just one?

Your support will make a priceless contribution towards the vital work that we undertake in poor communities around the world. We guarantee that 80% of the money you give will go directly to help a child and their community.

Roni Javier pictured here, lives with his mother in the Honduras, in what can hardly be called a house. It has a straw roof, a dirt floor and a make-shift hearth for cooking. There is no sanitation and Roni has often been ill and undernourished. Now Roni has a sponsor we are able to work constantly to see to his health and development. The more sponsors we can find, the more children like Roni can be helped to a safer and brighter future.

Somewhere, this very minute a child is waiting to be sponsored by you. Please don't delay - you will make a huge difference to more than just one life.

Just £15 a month can give a child a decent future.

Your sponsorship can be for as long as you wish – six months, a year, or until the child leaves school. You will receive a photo of the child, details of his or her family background, regular progress reports and letters from the child you are supporting.

Yes, I would like to sponsor a child

PE83

Send to Robert Edwards, Christian Children's Fund, 4 Bath Place, Rivington Street, London EC2A 3DR or CCF GB, FREEPOST WC4509, London EC2B 2FN (no stamp needed in UK)

My first monthly payment of £15 is enclosed by cheque/Postal Order ☐
(cheques made payable to CCF GB)

I would prefer to pay £15 by Visa / Mastercard /Access / Amex / Diners ☐

Card No: ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Valid from: ☐☐ - ☐☐ Expiry Date: ☐☐ - ☐☐

Signature for card payments _____

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

I prefer a boy ☐ girl ☐ either ☐

In any country OR

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Please send my information pack today ☐

I cannot sponsor a child but would like to donate a gift of £ _____

CCF

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Gnome

I AM disgusted by the attempt to remove my peerage by the Canadian Government under its leader Mr Jacques Crétin.

Monsieur Crétin cites the so-called Colonial Sycophancy Ruling of 1924 which debars wealthy Canadian press barons from accepting British honours for services to Conservative newspapers.

This, however, is just a smokescreen to hide his real motives, viz wounded pride at an attack in my paper *The Moose Of The World* (Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal) in which Monsieur Crétin was described as "a Communist fellow traveller, a known spy and a singles-bar addict with an unsavoury appetite for exotic substances".

The day when the press can no longer publish justifiable political criticism in a serious newspaper for fear that its owner will be deprived of his well-earned peerage is a sad day for myself, not to mention my wife Lady Barbarella Amiel-Gnome.

E. Strobes
pp. Lord Gnome
c/o The Daily Telegraph
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Canada Square
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"The wogs begin at Dover"

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ABC
CONSUMER PRESS

COLOUR SECTION

AFTER 46 years on the throne the Queen has become accustomed to being the first to know about important national events. She was miffed, therefore, when she learned about Britain's participation in the bombing of Kosovo from the television rather than from her prime minister.

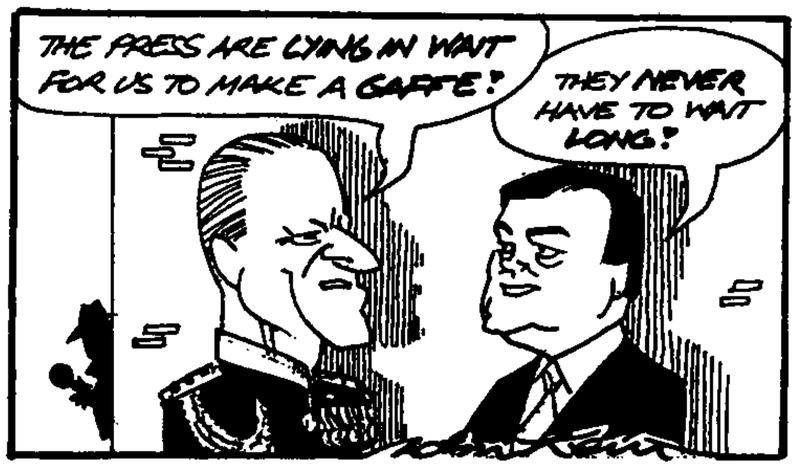
An increasingly tetchy relationship has developed in recent months between Buckingham Palace and Downing Street, one palace aide comparing it to the low point of the Windsor-Thatcher wars.

The rot set in soon after Tony Blair became prime minister and tried to drop his weekly audience with the Queen. Such meetings have taken place at 6.30 on Tuesday evenings, when parliament is sitting and Her Maj is in town, for as long as anyone can recall. Blair, however, told the palace he would be generally too busy to drop in for a chat.

It took the intervention of Sir Robert Fellowes, then the Queen's private secretary, to give Blair and his press secretary Alastair Campbell a few lessons on the British constitution. Fellowes also corrected Downing Street's impression that it was the PM who gave the Queen an audience, not the other way round.

Things settled down for a while but as Blair began to run the world singlehandedly, the Tuesday meetings slipped and the Queen has found herself more and more out in the cold. Soon, however, all this is likely to change.

Campbell is keen that Blair be seen beside the Queen Mother as much as possible during her



centenary celebrations next year. And when those photo opportunities are out of the way, Blair will turn his attention to the Queen as she approaches her golden jubilee in 2002. Associating Blair with an anticipated surge in royal approval ratings is expected to do the government no harm in a 2001 general election and 2002 Euro referendum. Blair's insistence that the Queen is with him at the dome on new year's eve, rather than her beloved Balmoral, is seen as only the beginning.

Meanwhile palace flunkeys are attempting to keep the royal jamborees as Blair-free as possible, but they fear a spy in the camp. Simon Lewis, the Queen's modernising spin doctor – it was his idea Her Maj should visit McDonald's and take tea in a council flat – is close to Blair's back room boys. Already the victim of the Queen's mimicry (see *Eye* 980), he has inherited a new nickname around the palace. Prince Philip, spot on as ever, has made the connection between Lewis's previous work for British Gas and his obsession with opinion poll ratings. He has dubbed him "The Meter Reader".

IF the press office at St James's Palace wants to portray Prince William as an ordinary lad, it needs to look a little more closely at how the common man lives.

A tremendous fuss was made when Wills passed his driving test just five weeks after his 17th birthday. The *Times* reported: "He took the test in a silver Ford Focus in Cirencester, Wiltshire...

"When he heard the good news the Prince is said to have got out of the car and punched the air in delight, shouting 'Yes'."

The fascinating account of the young blood's reaction overlooks the fact that there is not and never has been a driving test centre in Cirencester.

BRITISH Nuclear Fuels got a good buy in American nuclear power company Westinghouse, which it acquired in partnership with US company Morris Knudsen.

Westinghouse has an impressive CV. Back in 1991 it was found to have used creative accounting techniques to hide millions of dollars of cost overrun on a government contract. The following year it paid out $100m to the Philippine government to settle a suit which accused the firm of bribery over its contract to build a nuclear facility on the islands, conveniently situated five miles from an active volcano.

In 1995 it was named in the US as one of the top violators of labour law among government contractors for its failure to recognise unions and its dismissal practices. In 1998, the company was hit with a "class action" suit from 400 black employees charging racist employment practices.

Westinghouse's latest business success was overturning the US government's ban on atomic exports to China. In the face of a $40bn offer for 20 power stations, President Bill Clinton decided to brush aside The People's Republic's unfortunate tendency to sell on nuclear technology to other countries.

Recently China was implicated in the sale of nuclear know-how to Pakistan, currently engaged in a my-bomb's-bigger-than-yours stand-off with India, and to Iran, on whom it unloaded hundreds of tons of anhydrous hydrogen sulphide in 1998, using false end-user certificates. Interestingly, the purchase of Westinghouse by state-owned BNFL means British taxpayers will not only be paying for Chinese power stations, but may also be subsidising the export of nuclear bits and bobs to any country that has the cash.

THE EFFORTS of Phoney Pharaoh Mohamed Fayed to get the Harrods logo onto anything that moves led to the setting up of a Harrods-sponsored cycle team last year. "Harrods-Sixt" cyclists competed in several national competitions, and achieved respectable results in last summer's national track championships, organised by the British cycling federation.

They were less successful, however, in retrieving the sponsorship money due to them from the top people's store. As training and competitions costs mounted and bill after bill remained unpaid, the Harrods riders were perhaps not entirely surprised to find out last month – by means of a report in *Cycling Weekly* magazine – that their team had been disbanded following the departure of Tony Foote, the colourful character who headed the aptly-named "On Your Bike" franchise responsible for the cycling team, and who is now described by the shop as having had something of a "chequered career".

Cyclists contacting Harrods with enquiries as to when they might see the money due to them – money which is essential if they wish to continue training for competitions such as next year's Olympics – have enigmatically been told that "the boss hasn't decided".

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Street of Shame

REGARDING our new binman, Benjamin Gerald Pell, 35, a cleaner, of Tenterden Grove NW4, appeared at Marylebone magistrates' court on 5 May charged with theft of rubbish from commercial premises in W1.

Mr Pell, who will be appearing again on 8 September, has told journalists: "If I go down I am taking everyone with me", leaving hacks on several national newspapers running scared.

THE *Sunday Mirror* often boasts about exposing fraudsters. But now it employs one: night editor Ross Anderson, who has been cautioned by police for alleged fraud after applying for a £14,000 loan using a false name.

Anderson, who earns £65,000 a year, was rumbled after using the surname of his landlady and her address to persuade Lombard Direct to give him a loan. After an investigation Lombard wrote to his landlady, Victoria Charlton: "We have received information which suggests that your address has been misused by a fraudster."

The matter was referred to Limehouse police by Charlton who was already in dispute with Anderson over unpaid rent. The *Mirror* executive had bounced two cheques on her, totalling £10,000. "Anderson provided Lombard Credit Direct with my bank details, my name and address," said Charlton. "The loan was turned down when Lombard checked the phone number against my name. He had given his phone as my property. He also gave my place of employment as the Mirror Group – where he works and my previous address as his previous address."

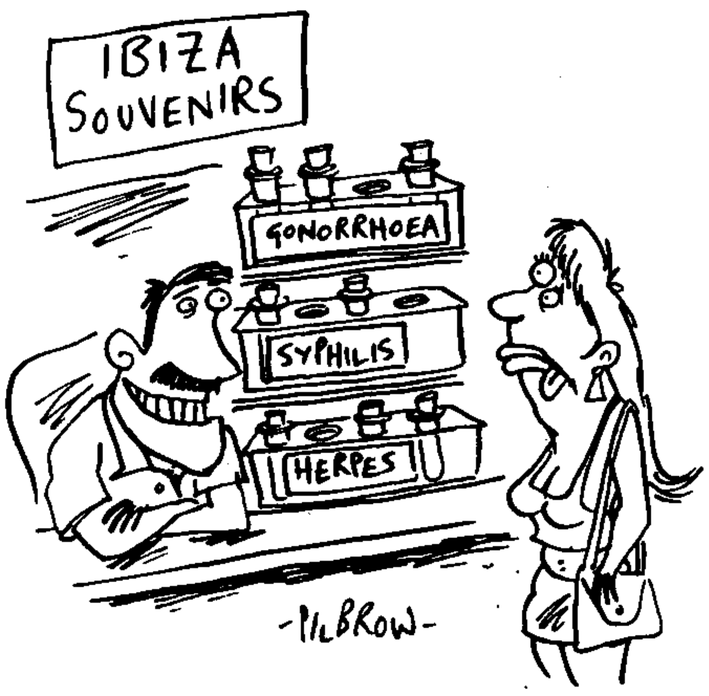
Anderson admitted the offence to the police who cautioned him but told Charlton he would only be charged if she pursued the case. Exhausted by months of trying to get rent out of him, Charlton did not press charges. Instead she served him with an eviction order and is pursuing judgement against him for rent arrears.

The *Sunday Mirror* defended Anderson and told Charlton this was a "one-off" lapse of judgement by its night editor. This is strange as Charlton was recently telephoned by a former girlfriend of Anderson who said she had experienced exactly the same nightmare. "The things that happened in my house when he was there are unspeakable," she said.

AS *Grauniad* boxwallah Brian Whitaker points out on our letters page, his paper has signed a confidentiality agreement "which means we cannot comment" on the abrupt and mysterious departure of veteran hack Martin "Sweety" Walker.

How odd, then, that a "very senior representative of the *Guardian*" rang *Spectator* media pundit Stephen Glover last week to give him an extensive briefing on the case against Walker. Glover duly quoted this unnamed source at length in his column.

Who was the "senior representative" who so flagrantly breached the confidentiality agreement? Step forward Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Grauniad*.



WHY was the *Observer* forced to publish a retraction on 8 August of its statement on 25 July that Christopher Monckton, the homophobic designer of the new puzzle game Eternity, is a member of the Conservative Family Campaign (CFC)?

It is surely a matter of a small technicality rather than the broader truth. Monckton is not a member, but when the CFC last produced a batch of headed note paper his name was there in print as one of the sponsors. Admittedly this was before the 1997 general election when it became too embarrassing to list as sponsors the many former Tory MPs who had lost their seats.

CFC chairman Hugh McKinney told the *Eye* that sponsors are selected because they are influential people who can be called upon to promote the organisation's policy ideas, and they are always consulted before their name is used.

McKinney said Monckton was already a sponsor when he became chairman five years ago. Before that the CFC was chaired by Stephen Green, a particularly unpleasant character described by his successor as "completely off the wall". During his time at the CFC Green campaigned for such enlightened goals as transporting all homosexuals to the Isle of Wight to keep them out of the way.

According to McKinney, when he took over the homophobic old guard departed in disgust at the switch of focus to issues such as divorce, marriage tax allowance and the high numbers of children in care.

Whether or not this is the case, the fact remains that Monckton never requested his name be removed from the list of sponsors, so it remains a mystery why he is now so keen to force the point over his membership.

AS the Silly Season gets going and readers are treated to an orgy of space-filling articles about pashminas and footballers' haircuts, the brazen honesty of the *Express* compels admiration.

On 5 August it carried a huge puff-piece about the new Encarta dictionary being put into orbit aboard a Russian rocket. Or, as the headline declared in very large type: "My Word! Just Look How We're Filling Up Space."

NO WONDER the *Sunday Times* has been short of a decent scoop for so long (see *Eye* 982) when even its own hacks hide stories from the news team.

On 1 August the sports puff on the front page offered £126,000 worth of cash prizes in the fantasy football league for the new season, while a "Premiership Preview" box on the front of the sports section boasted: "Hugh McIlvanney leads our unrivalled team of writers as we look ahead to season 1999-2000. The best writing, the sharpest analysis – the finest football coverage is in The Sunday Times."

On Monday 2 August sister paper the *Times* ran a slightly less contrived sports feature: a front page story on the £40,000 bung offered to Alex Ferguson by Russian football agent Grigory Essaoulenko to push through the transfer of player Andrei Kanchelskis.

The story was lifted from Ferguson's autobiography *Managing My Life,* serialised in the *Thunderer* all that week. The book took the Manchester United manager one and a half years to write with the help of a well-known sports journalist. And who was the trusty hack who kept the story of the bung locked away for all that time? Step forward... Hugh McIlvanney of the *Sunday Times*.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Who's the e-commerce boss you'd want online?" asked the *Indie*'s business section on 11 August, for its regular feature in which "market leaders" identify the rival they most admire.

"It is very difficult to know who one's peers are," was the lofty reply from Mark Johnson of consultants KPMG. "Those I know by name, I don't admire. I do respect John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems in the US, for the vision which has made Cisco the epitome of e-business... he does it better than anyone."

A wise choice. Though Johnson forgot to mention it, Chambers has just announced that Cisco Systems is making an investment of more than $1bn in, er, KPMG.

BORIS JOHNSON, new editor of the *Spectacularlyboring*, is nothing if not aware of the nature of his readership.

One of his first acts on succeeding to the chair of Johnson-in-chief was to contact staff of the *Erotic Review* and request a copy of their mailing list to target that journal's discerning readership with the fleshy delights of his own fantasy-filled publication.

Since Johnson himself has on occasion knocked off a quick piece for the *Erotic Review*, can we expect a fruitful editorial crossover between the two titles?

HACKETTES belonging to Women In Journalism (WIJ) got rather carried away at their summer party, to judge by a stern memo sent to all members afterwards.

"Many editors have expressed concern at the 'selling' at WIJ parties, with members offering them CVs and ideas on the spot," it reveals. "Several have commented that they will not attend future WIJ parties because of this."

A code of practice is now being drawn up whereby members and their guests must confine themselves to social chit-chat when they meet editors. "Direct discussion of specific commissions, jobs or work issues should be reserved for follow-up letters and calls during work hours, unless both parties indicate that they wish to discuss the matter immediately."

However, the memo then explains why it's important not to frighten editors and commissioning editors away from the WIJ bunfights: their absence would "seriously damage the networking potential". Shome mishtake, shurely?

WORLD OF SPORT

WHEN Kate Hoey was appointed sports minister, informed observers guessed that a gaffe couldn't be far behind.

Sure enough, within days the Arsenal-supporting motormouth was forced to make a grovelling apology for her outspoken attack on Manchester United whose manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, is a friend and supporter of Tony Blair.

A rather more obvious candidate for the job would have been Tom Pendry MP, who is genuinely popular in the football world and served as Labour's spokesman on sport for most of the 1990s. But to Pendry's dismay he was passed over for the sports portfolio after the 1997 landslide, for reasons that had nothing to do with sport. In the paranoid world of NewLab, politicians are judged by the company they keep, and Pendry had two of the worst friends possible from No 10's viewpoint: John Prescott, with whom he served as a junior minister in Northern Ireland during the 1970s; and Tony Booth, professional Scouse git and unloved prime ministerial father-in-law, who is a longstanding Labour activist in Pendry's constituency.

For years Hoey campaigned ruthlessly for Pendry's job, and several newspapers had to print retractions after prematurely anointing her as shadow sports minister. The Hoey publicity machine got much of its mileage by using the protection of parliamentary privilege to make actionable allegations against Terry Venables, and about football corruption generally.

Alongside *Telegraph* hack Mihir Bose, she came to be seen as part of a propaganda war fought against Venables by his former chairman at Spurs, Alan Sugar. Pendry, by contrast, thought it better for his political health to keep well away from Sugar, resigning his post as Spurs' parliamentary adviser after the Amstrad tycoon took over.

In the autumn of 1997, an official FA premier league inquiry reported on the bung allegations. Although Hoey had done so much to promote the scandal, and coincidentally raise her own profile, she refused to assist the inquiry by repeating her claims outside the protection of parliamentary privilege. The FA said it was "unhappy" with her lack of cooperation, while the co-author of the inquiry report, Robert Reid QC, commented wryly that "nothing surprises me about politicians".

Needless to say, the *Telegraph* was the first to sing Hoey's praises the day after her appointment, with a huge back-page OBN job by her old crony Mihir Bose. But more influential voices in the world of sport, including the FA, are wondering how many gaffes Labour can afford if England is to stand a chance of hosting the 2006 World Cup.

LUVVIES

To make it believable, you have to believe you are dying. It was like hallucinating. I went into a place in my soul I never knew existed; I went inside a black hole that I couldn't get out of, and it was like my soul and my spirit had turned into some bizarre heavy substance like a cross between coal and lead.

KATE WINSLET
(on death scenes)
Reading Evening Post

Someone once asked me, "When did you become an actress?" I don't think I ever became one. It was always there. It's like someone asking me when I became a woman.

SALMA HAYEK
Times

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

BALKAN NEWS

THE KLA celebrated Tony Blair's brief visit to Kosovo in traditional style by bombing Serb churches. Nato was quick to state that it "vigorously condemns this cowardly attack against a place of worship" – apparently forgetting Nato's own splendid record in this department.

While the allies only took out 13 Serb tanks during the Kosovo conflict, they scored direct hits on the Monastery Gracanica, Monastery Rakovica, the Patriarchate of Pec, the Monastery of St Juraj, the Monastery of St Nicholas in Kursumlija, the Monastery in Zemun, the Vojlovica Monastery, the Hopovo Monastery, plus assorted churches, graveyards and memorials.

The continuing KLA activities underline the difficulties of policing Kosovo. But the Americans have an ingenious solution: privatisation! An "outsourcing" company, Dyncorp, has been advertising for 350 serving or recently retired American cops to take $97,000-a-year jobs in the Balkans with the "International Police Monitoring Force", the civilian-style force that is meant to stabilise the province.

American police have great experience in dealing fairly with minority groups, of course, as the LAPD showed with its treatment of Rodney King. Earlier this year an unarmed devout Muslim immigrant from Guinea, Amadou Diallo, died in a hail of 41 bullets from New York police. Last year a black teenager was shot – though not to death – by the NYPD for carrying a water pistol. And last month some convictions were finally achieved for the NYPD's beating, sodomy (with an "instrument") and torture of black Haitian Abner Louima.

Dyncorp also has useful experience, particularly in raising posses for the US government. The state department hired Dyncorp to train the Haitian national police after America's other great humanitarian intervention. Although the HNP's record is certainly better than that of the dreaded Tonton Macoutes, the US-based Human Rights Watch found that – even with Dyncorp's assistance – they carried out "extrajudicial executions, the unjustified or disproportionate use of lethal force, and beatings".

Things are done differently in Britain, thank God: there's no suggestion that Group 4 will be providing security guards for Kosovo. Instead, Tony Blair has promised to send 60 officers from... the RUC. As the foreign office tactfully puts it, they "have the best experience in the world of policing in the sort of conditions they will find in Kosovo". So if Chris Patten concludes that the RUC is hopelessly sectarian and should be disbanded, there will at least be other job opportunities for its former officers.

MEANWHILE the first big UK construction deal in Kosovo has gone to a firm that was closely involved in destroying the region.

Cluster-bomb manufacturer Hunting has won the £110m contract to build winter homes for 5,000 soldiers in Kosovo – or, to be precise, 4,998 soldiers, since one of Hunting's unexploded cluster bombs recently took out two Gurkhas.

HACKWATCH
Eclipseballs

JOHNNY ROTTEN famously described sex as "two minutes of squelching". The solar eclipse may have lasted no longer than that, but imaginative hacks managed to prolong the excitement for many days through ingenious foreplay. Here's how the no-nonsense, down-to-earth *Daily Mail* prepared its readers for their brief moment of "totality":

2 August: Since "many claim the world will end" on 11 August, the *Mail* sends its roving hack Paul Harris to the Israeli town of Armageddon. "Undeniably, Armageddon exudes an inexplicable lure," he reports, citing apocalyptic warnings from the Book of Revelation. "So, will Armageddon come to Armageddon on the day of the eclipse? The truth is, it's just a little too early to say." Back home, however, the omens are grim. "Eclipse watchers heading for Cornwall could be heading for a damp squib," the *Mail* predicts.

4 August: "Eclipse Countdown: seven days to go." But don't get too excited: a British woman tells the *Mail* how she was blinded for life after looking at a solar eclipse for "just two or three seconds" while living near New York in 1994. Oh, and hippies visiting Cornwall for next week's eclipse have already had a violent confrontation with the police.

6 August: The eclipse could cost industry half a billion pounds in lost production, the *Mail* suggests. Meanwhile, a leading eye specialist warns that children should be kept indoors for the duration or else they'll lose their sight. "Five days to go," the paper adds cheerfully.

7 August: Only four days to go, and the *Mail* has a six-page supplement on why the eclipse "will have a defining impact on all our lives". Hackette Anne Shooter deals with readers' most frequently asked questions. Is Cornwall going to be over-run with hippies? "Well, because of the mystical significance of the event, there will be many druids and New Age types." How can we avoid them? "You could watch it on TV." Could the world end next Wednesday? "We'll have to wait and see."

The paper's astrologer, Jonathan Cainer, offers further enlightenment. "It is so important, so significant, that I hardly know how to begin explaining it to you," he writes. "Think of it as a cosmic wash cloth which harnesses the scouring strength of Saturn, the polishing power of Mars, and the unique 'magic formula' of the planet Uranus. There's not a sad, sorry stain in the world that can withstand this cosmic combination."

9 August: Another day, another useful pull-out supplement — this time on How the Eclipse Will Affect Your Love Life. "The eclipse is urging you to take a leap of faith," readers are advised. "This will require courage and humility... but if you make that your policy, your love life will rapidly and dramatically improve." Other news is less encouraging. "The rush to see the eclipse in all its glory has simply failed to happen," *Mail* hack Tim Woodward reports, blaming the lack of interest on an excess of "pre-eclipse hype".

10 August: Despondency is setting in: the *Mail* warns that "the shadow of a financial fiasco" has fallen across the eclipse as sun-watchers stay away from Cornwall. In the same story, however, it says that 500,000 people are expected to crowd on to boats off the Cornish coast — and predicts "hundreds of incidents" of vessels crashing into one another as darkness falls.

But nothing can dampen the enthusiasm of local author Colin Wilson. "You could say that the millennium will begin with the eclipse, and that it will catapult us into the New Age," he suggests, revealing that "a child of a druid, born during the eclipse, will have magical powers, like the wizard Merlin". Wilson's wife will be watching the eclipse "in her blue druidic robes" — though she is not, alas, expecting to give birth.

11 August: The great day dawns. "Britain will come to a halt this morning," the *Daily Mail* announces on its front page. And, if Jonathan Cainer is right, it may well stay that way.

"What if the ancient prophecies are right?" he muses. "What if this eclipse really does spell the beginning of the end of the world? Or what, for that matter, if it means the opposite? What if, as we all stare hopefully upwards at the sky, a ladder descends from the heavens? What if the creator steps gracefully down it to walk among us all in human form once more? Or what if we are somehow summoned to walk up it and account for our actions here on Earth?... I am now going to offer you my very best, most honest answer: 'I don't know'." His guess, however, is that "the eclipse does indeed herald an imminent day of judgment".

Barmy Bel Mooney, already in position on Goonhilly Downs, is equally apprehensive. "When I realised that in Cornwall the eclipse will occur at the 11th minute of the 11th hour of the 11th day, I felt a shiver. There was an apocalyptic ring to that timing that felt like more than coincidence." She warns us not to forget "Nostradamus's prophecy that at this eclipse 'the monster will appear in broad daylight'."

12 August: No monsters, no stairways to heaven, no multiple pile-ups of small boats. "AWESOME", the *Mail*'s front-page headline raves. "Pretty awesome," agrees Ray Connolly, the paper's on-the-spot observer in Newquay. Hackette Barbara Davies lyrically describes the moment when "God turned down the dimmer switch". Not to be outdone, Ray Connolly reveals that the darkness was "as sudden as if some celestial hand had turned a dimmer switch on the world". Or, on second thoughts, "it was as though God had come on to the pitch, run the length of the field and scored a winner in the last seconds of extra time". Or, if you prefer, "as though the world had tumbled off its axis." Whatever, Connolly now understands why "the ancients" (unlike the modern *Daily Mail*) saw eclipses as portents of the end of the world: "Because for just a moment on Fistral Beach, Cornwall, yesterday morning, we saw the world without sun." It was "something unrepeatable in our lifetimes."

Er, not quite. If Connolly wants another sunless vision, he could always try looking out of his bedroom window one night.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Well, that was just fantastic, wasn't it? It more than lived up to the promise and made the moaners look pathetic."

— *Mirror* editorial on the eclipse, 12 August, page 6

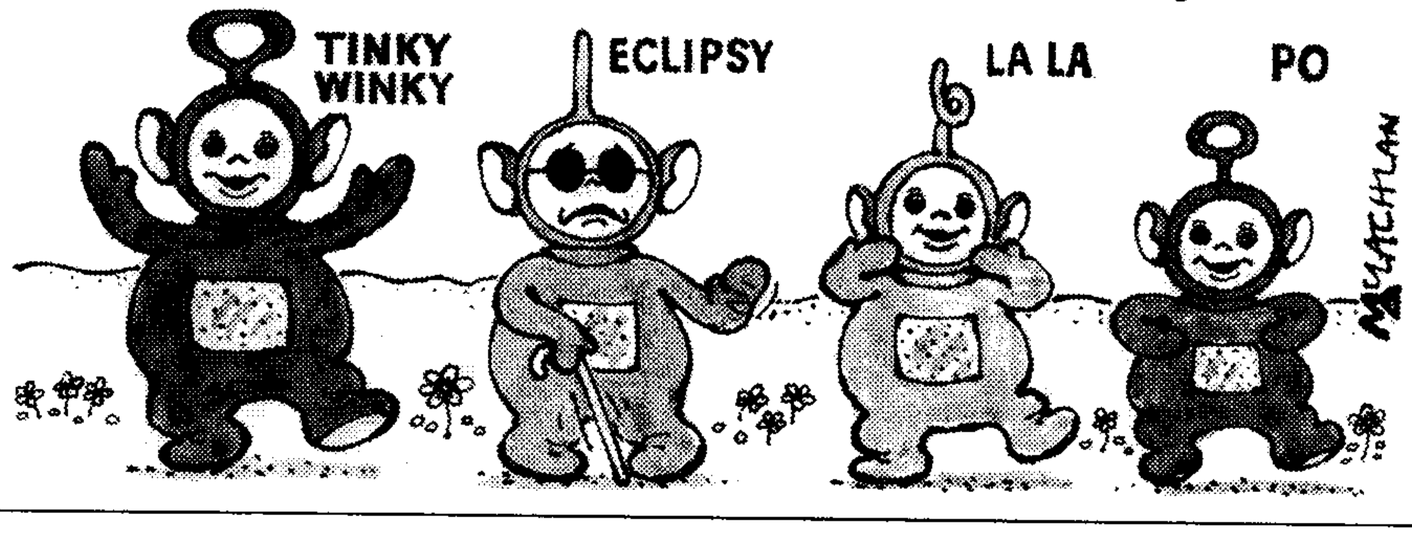
"*Nine O'Clock News* linkman Michael Buerk was as gloomy as the eclipse that might have been... 'Er, yes, right,' he said finally, reflecting the growing desperation of most reporters trying to cover the non-event."

— *Mirror*, 12 August, page 7

OH, YEAH? A NEW COLUMN OF AMAZING FACTS

"One of the many who were not at their desks at eclipse time was Marie Claire Editor Liz Jones. She had to stay at home to 'cover the eyes' of her many cats."

– *The Times*, 13 August



WHEN Peter Mandelson shared a flight to Brazil earlier this month with Great Train Robber Bruce Reynolds (who was on his way to Ronnie Biggs's 70th), it must have been one of the few recent foreign jollies Mandy has funded from his own pocket.

As the latest Commons register of members' interests reveals, he has been a busy boy since his fall from grace last December, with an itinerary most cabinet ministers would envy.

He started the year in style with a weekend break in Paris to attend the yearly British-French *colloque* from 14-16 January, travel and accommodation paid for by BP.

This special relationship between the former trade and industry secretary and the petrochemical giant has no bearing on the approval of a controversial collaboration between BP and US oil company Amoco at Baglan Bay near Port Talbot shortly after Mandelson announced the end of a moratorium on gas-fired power stations.

29-31 January: Peter took off on another European city break, this time to Cologne, sponsored by the Foreign Policy Centre-New Policy Network.

7-15 February: the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union paid for him to fly to Johannesburg and Cape Town.

26-27 February: the Institute for Public Policy Research paid for his flight and board to Milan to speak at a conference on the Dilemmas of Globalisation, a subject upon which such a well-travelled chap must have plenty to say.

8 March: An all-expenses paid trip to Madrid to speak *at The Economist* Agenda 2000 Conference.

18-20 April: Across the Atlantic to speak at a conference at the Hudson Institute, a rightwing American think tank which promotes intensive farming and pesticide use.

In April "Have Suitcase, Will Travel" also managed a trip to Corfu and Albania courtesy of Lord Rothschild to visit the Butrint Foudation, around his Washington jaunt.

23-24 May: Back to Madrid to speak at a conference on Mexico paid for by the Euroamerica Foundation, swiftly followed by a return to the States from 28-31 May to the Howard Gilman Symposium in Georgia, travel and accommodation provided by the Progessive Foundation and Firstmark Communications.

In June Peter flew to Portugal for the secretive and influential Bilderberg Conference.

Apparently reluctant ever to pay his own way, Peter has also borrowed a jazzy new iMac computer from "new" Labour's favourite public relations guru Matthew Freud – he of the millennium dome PR contract.

EXECUTIVES at Jaguar eagerly await publication of former paymaster-general Geoffrey Robinson's book in the autumn in case it reveals the whereabouts of the numerous cars he inadvertently mislaid as their chief executive in the 1970s.

While he resided in numerous hotels and motels in the Warwickshire area, he literally "forgot" where he had left his cars overnight. Fortunately the Jaguar factory at Browns Lane, Coventry, had a plentiful replacement supply for him to "test drive".

Every summer the Blair family went to Italy – to the villa in The Garden, a lush wilderness of cypress trees and bougainvillea tumbling down to the sea. Phoebe, who owned the villa and lived close by, loved the Blairs – of all her summer guests they were the ones who gave meaning to her life.

Blurb for *The Fifth Summer* by Titia Sutherland (Black Swan, 1991)

THE mystery of former Tory minister Rod Richards is not why he has been summarily sacked as leader of the Tories in the Welsh assembly but how he ever got the job in the first place.

One answer might be that the Welsh Tory bosses and Tory leader William Hague do not read their *Private Eyes* carefully enough. *Eye* 900 (14 June 1996) celebrated the humiliation of Rod "the Rod" after he was photographed in compromising circumstances by the tabloids to illustrate headings such as MINISTER'S BONDAGE ROMP WITH DIVORCEE.

The *Eye* took its readers through the glamorous history of this most glamorous politician: from his six years' work for British intelligence in Northern Ireland, to his job as newsreader for Welsh BBC, to his annihilation as Tory candidate in the safe Tory seat of Vale of Glamorgan.

His business career was hardly more triumphant: he left the board of Contemporary Design Systems, which sold "anti-terrorist equipment"; after seven months: exactly the time he survived in the board of Piranha Pictures, which went bust. Like a true entrepreneur, he bought a pub and applied for a government grant (from the Welsh Tourist Board) to keep it going. When a local builder did some work to save the pub from collapsing into an underground stream, Richards refused to pay £20,000 in compensation and costs.

None of this deterred Richards from consistent attacks on his opponents. He called Peter Hain a liar, and had to apologise; and described all Welsh Labour councillors as corrupt, and had to apologise. His arrogant and offensive behaviour with journalists, especially female ones, earned him universal contempt in the media.

Perhaps Richards's most surprising campaign was his strenuous opposition to a public inquiry into child abuse in North Wales. The stronger the evidence emerged of official cover-up and widespread abuse, the more hysterical and obtuse were Richards's public statements. He accused those campaigning for an inquiry of prurience.

It was only after Richards left office, stinking of sleaze, that the new Welsh secretary finally plucked up courage and set up the Waterhouse inquiry whose findings are expected any day now. That Welsh secretary was William Hague – which makes Hague's tacit acquiescence in the appointment of Rod the Rod as leader of the Welsh Tories all the more remarkable.

AS voters struggle with the identities of the latest bunch of nonentities elevated to the junior ranks of government in Tony Blair's virtual reshuffle, one face they will not be able to forget is that of new transport spokesman Keith "Gargoyle" Hill.

Few come more loyal to the Blairite cause than "Gargoyle", who made his maiden television appearance in his new role heaping praise on John Prescott's much derided public-private partnership for London Underground.

Blithely riding roughshod over an independent study which revealed that Prescott's scheme would a) be hugely expensive and b) probably fail, "Gargoyle" went on to dismiss an alternative scheme put forward by the RMT union. In rubbishing the union's plan, he expressed delight that "at least the RMT weren't threatening any strike action in their new campaign".

What "Gargoyle" neglected to mention is: a) like his boss John Prescott he is an RMT-sponsored MP; and b) en route to the House of Commons he had even been employed by the RMT rail union as a research officer. It must be cheering for Jimmy Knapp to have loyal old friends like these in high places.

RAGE and jubilation were both in evidence at the Labour-controlled council at Newcastle-on-Tyne when John Prescott's department of the environment, transport and the regions (DETR), after long and detailed consideration, flung out its ambitious proposal for a new 30,000 sq ft superstore on vacant industrial land known as Walkergate.

The land is owned by the Shepherd brothers – Freddy Shepherd being back as chairman of Newcastle United FC after an embarrassing absence caused by a tabloid story about his drunken and lecherous behaviour in a brothel.

The Shepherds used to be firm Tories but are

New Electronic Voting System

recent converts to "new" Labour and have even thrown their stately home open for an expensive bash, attended by Tony Blair, to raise funds for the Labour party. The chief supporter of their extravagant plans for Walkergate is the MP for Newcastle East, the agriculture minister Nick Brown. This is believed to be the first case even in Labour party history where a planning scheme supported enthusiastically by one cabinet minister has been turned down by another.

One reason the scheme was turned down was that it blatantly contradicted elementary planning regulations, and that a perfectly satisfactory and legal, though more modest, plan existed for an alternative food store in Shields Road. Council planning officials were horrified by Walkergate, and could see no purpose in it except overproduction and the further enrichment of... the Shepherd brothers.

Civil war in the council led to a narrow vote against Walkergate at the planning committee, but the council later approved a slightly less ambitious scheme submitted by the Shepherds. Prescott "called in" the scheme and despite the vehement and sometimes hysterical support from his cabinet colleague has now finally dispensed with it. Mr Brown is said to be "hopping mad" about an unfriendly article on Walkergate in the *Economist* of 7 August which he attributes to his growing band of enemies in Newcastle. What can he mean?

The dispute has also caused problems in the council's legal department. Val Dodds, the new chief legal officer, is suing the council for discrimination because her predecessor Henry Warne was paid more than she is. The council cannot obviously employ its own legal advisers in a case brought by its own chief legal officer, so it has had to resort to solicitors elsewhere in the city.

Tactfully it has not approached Henry Warne, who is now in private practice as a lawyer in Newcastle – and advising owners of properties in Shields Road who are contesting compulsory purchase by the council of properties wanted for the Shields Road scheme which has nothing to do with the Shepherds or Nick Brown and does not flout planning regulations.

MPs STILL FOR HIRE: 1

A New Series

DESPITE their huge pay rises and recent "reforms", many MPs remain on the payroll of outside bodies. What's more, several continue to have real and potential conflicts of interest between their commercial paymasters and their parliamentary positions. This week: Oil, Gas and Power.

Ann Campbell (Parliamentary private secretary to John Battle, the energy minister, and leading member of the all-party parliamentary energy group): She is a director of the Welding Institute, which pays her between £5,000 and £10,000 a year. The institute is 20 percent funded by the oil, gas, petrochemical and power industry.

Dr Michael Clark (Conservative chairman of the select committee on science and technology): He is parliamentary advisor to British Gas plc, the British chemical contractors association and the royal society of chemistry. He is paid total annual fees of £15,000.

Ronnie Campbell (Labour MP): His research assistant is Roger Pope, PR director of the electricity association, who has a House of Commons pass.

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT MAY be the silly season but I have two happy conclusions to report to two old cases. First Greenwich, where the council, in collusion with English Partnerships, once used the excuse of the necessity for a station on the extension of the Docklands Light Railway to propose the demolition of an entire block of historic buildings in the very heart of the town — a world heritage site — so allowing an exciting new development as well *(Eyes passim)*.

This barbarism was successfully opposed by the DLR Monitoring Group, supported by English Heritage, the Georgian Group and many others. In the event, under the DLR Lewisham act, permission was given only to adapt No 53 Greenwich Church Street as an entrance to the proposed "Cutty Sark" station, thereby both providing the welcome new public transport and preserving the character of one of the most interesting parts of London.

But that was not good enough for Messrs Centros Miller, the developers working with the railway promoters, who in 1998 proposed the demolition of 53 Greenwich Church Street, together with neighbouring houses at 47, 49 and 51, to make a nice modern Cutty Sark Station (with shops). Arguing that poor old No 53, being built 150 years ago, was "near the end of its natural life" (like the nearby Royal Hospital and the Queen's House, I suppose?), Centros Miller insisted that the conclusions of the House of Lords select committee in 1992 permitted a new station at the site of No 53. And yet again that irresponsible body Greenwich borough council did its best to spoil Greenwich by giving permission for demolition.

So the DLR Monitoring Group took the matter back to the House of Lords and, on 30 July, the chairman of committees, Lord Boston of Faversham QC, announced that "any disinterested person who has seen and heard the evidence" would have concluded that the select committee's original remark, that "the entrance to the station shall be at number 53 or there will be no station" meant precisely that, and that the Centros Miller proposals do not conform to the decisions that informed the 1993 act. So now, if the developers behave themselves, the facades of the historic buildings in Greenwich Church Street will be retained and repaired and Greenwich will have a perfectly serviceable but discreet underground station.

The importance of this ruling goes beyond Greenwich. It is the first time a community group, on its own, has successfully taken a petition back to the House of Lords and won. So it is a victory for local democracy as well as for sanity. But what will happen if and when Mr Blair abolishes the House of Lords? And what, after all, if My Lord Rogers of Riverside had been hired to "design" the new Cutty Sark Station? It doesn't bear thinking about.

AND then there is Crosby Hall in Chelsea. This 15th century building once stood tucked away in the City of London and, when it was threatened with demolition, was saved by the great sociologist Patrick Geddes and other like-minded, public-spirited conservationists.

The medieval structure was acquired and reerected in 1908-10 on the Chelsea Embankment for the enjoyment of Londoners and as the core of a proposed complex of buildings for a women's college. Notwithstanding some rather bad extensions built in the 1960s, all went well until Margaret Thatcher, in one of her supreme acts of public-spirited malice, abolished the Greater London Council. The London Residuary Body then sold Crosby Hall to the businessman Christopher Moran, who promptly bought out the lease of the British Federation of University Women. He was then given permission by the royal borough of Kensington & Chelsea to rebuild Crosby Hall as a private house, removing the hall itself from the public realm by denying the long-established public access.

In 1992 Moran hired architects Carden & Godfrey — the successor firm to Walter Godfrey, the Arts and Crafts architect who had so carefully recreated Crosby Hall 80 years earlier. Their brief was to demolish the 1960s bits and to complete Crosby Hall as an enclosed courtyard house in the Tudor style facing the Thames. And this the architects did as well as conditions and the state of architecture in the 1990s allows, incorporating such period features as an underground car park designed to house eight Rolls Royces, or whatever.

And then, in 1997 Moran switched architects and declined to pay Carden & Godfrey's outstanding fees on a job worth £4m. Carden & Godfrey decided to sue — a brave thing to do as they would have been broken by costs had they lost. But they didn't

lose. Moran adopted the usual ploy of countersuing for £480,000, claiming negligence. Last month, in the high court, Moran was awarded £9,978 for a terrace built at an incorrect rake, but the rest of his claims were rejected and he was ordered to pay the architects' outstanding fees of £82,000. Moran now has to pay costs of some £400,000 and Judge David Wilcox refused him leave to appeal. Hooray. As the architects commented: "The richer the client, the harder it is to get your bills paid."

But a moral victory? I am not sure. Never mind the morality of building in an historical style in the late 20th century; all that worries me is that the work is simply not as good as it would have been if Walter Godfrey had completed the college in 1910, even without the expert advice of Dr Simon Thurley. Moran may have lost but the public has not gained: Crosby Hall remains private and inaccessible, thanks to Mrs Thatcher's and Kensington & Chelsea's betrayal of the intentions of those who saved the hall at the beginning of this century.

'Piloti'

JUST as the new militarists in "new" Labour continued forcefully to deny overwhelming evidence that Chinook helicopters flown all over the world by the RAF are not safe, Chinook helicopters everywhere have been grounded for safety reasons.

The immediate reason was the discovery of cracks in the transmission gear of an RAF plane. At once, the ministry of defence issued a statement assuring the public that the grounding has absolutely nothing to do with the crash in June 1994 of a Chinook aircraft over the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland.

That crash killed the cream of the intelligence services in Northern Ireland. Twenty five senior intelligence officers died, which would normally have been hailed as a stupendous coup by the IRA. The IRA, however, had nothing to do with it.

The RAF, after an inquiry, decided the crash was entirely the fault of the two experienced pilots who also died in the helicopter. This verdict has since been vigorously contested by the magazine *Computer Weekly*, which in a series of articles and a long report (backed throughout by *Channel Four News*) has told an entirely different story.

Among the *Computer Weekly* revelations were:

- That the MoD has sued Textron Lycoming, contractors to the Chinook's manufacturers Boeing, for faulty design in the plane's engine control computer system, FADEC, and has been paid $3m compensation.
- The pilots of the plane which crashed knew of the legal action and were both extremely worried about flying the Chinook on their last fatal voyage.
- The Chinook which crashed was fitted with the FADEC computer system and would almost certainly have used it before turning away from the Mull, a familiar hazard to all pilots in the area.
- The fatal accident inquiry in Scotland was not told of the legal action between the MoD and Textron Lycoming over the FADEC computer system.

Computer Weekly was not impressed with official answers given by two Labour defence ministers, John Reid and Douglas Henderson. Reid told MPs in March 1998: "As far as I am aware, there has only been prior to that (the Mull of Kintyre crash) one Chinook accident." Er, not quite right.

In Britain between 1984 and 1994 there were nine serious accidents involving RAF Chinooks, none of them blamed on the crew. In the same period, according to the US Army Safety Center in Alabama, there were 116 serious accidents involving Chinooks, seven of them fatal. Only one of these involved a FADEC computer system. In most of the cases the real cause of the accidents is unknown. The only certainty is that the vast majority of them cannot be blamed on the pilots and for that matter only a minority can possibly be blamed on FADEC.

No doubt the grounding, at long last, of Chinooks throughout the world will expose more likely causes and lead to even more preposterous cover-ups.

NEW Labour's campaign for the Greater London Assembly is off to a rancorous start.

To select its candidates the London Labour party held a one-member, one-vote postal ballot. And great was the excitement at 5pm on Sunday 1 August when officers from the capital's constituency parties were summoned to Millbank to hear the results.

To satisfy Labour's plan that half the candidates should be women, constituencies were grouped together for the ballot. One region consisted of Haringey, Enfield, Harrow and Brent. The rules stated that the candidate topping the poll could choose which seat they wanted to fight. The region was regarded by party spin doctors and bean counters as a shoo-in for the former leader of Haringey council, "Lord" Toby Harris.

Harris' legacy to Haringey includes some of the worst schools in London (that's saying something) and a gigantic and illegal debt run by the council in rebuilding Alexandra Palace. But "Lord" Harris is also leader of the Association of London Government, and he has his sights set on being deputy mayor in Tony Blair's New London.

Imagine the shock, therefore, when Harris was trounced in the members' poll by fellow Haringey councillor Nicky Gavron. She is the ex-wife of "new" Labour plutocrat Bob Gavron and is well connected with various Labour luvvies. Blairite architect Lord Rogers even appeared on her election address.

At the Millbank meeting Ms Gavron announced that she would stand in the Haringey and Enfield seat, leaving Harris to sweep up in Brent and Harrow where he will be firmly under the gaze of his sworn enemy Ken Livingstone. Observers report that Harris went white with rage and began to shout. Candidates and officials withdrew to a hurried caucus "to resolve the matter through consultation". When Ms Gavron resisted private pressure, party officials hurriedly postponed the final selection.

On the evening of Thursday 5 August, a further meeting was held attended by Gavron, Harris, London Labour chair Jim Fitzpatrick and various officials. Despite obnoxious pressure from everyone at the meeting, Gavron insisted that the rules gave her the right to choose – and she had chosen Haringey & Enfield.

"But I am Lord Harris of Haringey," protested the portly peer, to no avail. Harris now faces grim evenings walking the streets of Brent & Harrow.

But "new" Labour need not despair. Bright young black candidate David Lammy, who was born in Tottenham where all the Labour votes live, was carved up in the poll, and will not now find a seat at all. So that's a relief then.

'Backbiter'

ETV

Jack of Hearts
Life Support
(both BBC1)

NEW drama series! At the height of summer! So entrenched is our belief that the BBC shows nothing but repeats and international athletics from Trondheim between the end of June and the beginning of September that it's easy to pass over such new series as actually appear. This, of course, may be the point.

If you transmit a stinker in the autumn, when even newspaper critics might be watching, truckloads of farmyard ordure are sure to land squarely on your executive head. But slip it out in the summer months and chances are no one will notice at all. On most channels they would call this clear thinking. At the BBC they also call this their regional policy.

Jack Of Hearts comes from BBC Wales and is set in elegant downtown Cardiff. Keith Allen plays Jack Denby, a rough 'n' tough probation officer who has moved down from London for dull plot reasons that needn't detain us here. He's the big city fish in the small city pond, and virtually everyone hates him.

His girlfriend's father hates him because he's so obviously the right man for her; his boss hates him because she's a cardboard harridan with a perennially knotted brow; and his male colleagues will no doubt turn on him when they realise that all women want to go to bed with him. In short, he's that crap telly standby, the charming misfit fated to win against the odds.

For Jack has one important TV advantage over everyone else: he's always right. Every case that lands on his desk he evaluates in an instant. He knows who's lying, he knows who's telling the truth. This tends to reduce the options for drama. As soon as Jack works out what's what, we know he will eventually be proved right and everyone else will be proved wrong.

This is bad enough in *A Touch Of Frost*, *Inspector Morse* and a thousand other series about maverick law enforcement officers played by men in their middle years. But Keith Allen is scarcely the most likeable of leading performers, and soon you find yourself rooting for all the other characters even though they are doomed by poor scripts to be humiliated by him at every turn.

Life Support, which comes from BBC Scotland, is better, although that's not hard. In

another infinitesimal variation on an over-familiar theme — this time the hospital drama — Aisling O'Sullivan plays medical ethicist Katherine Doone, the lone voice of common sense in a swamp of old storylines. Each week, just before *Panorama*, she is called upon to pronounce judgement on a timely ethical issue which has usually been delineated for us by minor characters with absurdly rigid views.

Most rigid of all is the smarmy surgeon Kamrun Blake, played by Art Malik. This character may originally have been called Cameron Blake and intended for a Scots actor. Then Malik was cast and the name was hamfistedly Indianised, possibly to save on photocopying. As it is, Malik plays him as a panto villain and we must thank BBC Scotland's make-up department for not giving him a pair of twirly moustaches.

O'Sullivan, by contrast, attacks her role with an almost Presbyterian grimness. She too is always right, but unlike Keith Allen she must suffer for it, with the usual disastrous domestic life and a tendency to run up against her old boyfriend in high profile legal cases, as people often do. Oh, and it's usually raining and she's forgotten to bring an umbrella.

Two more undistinguished series, then, of a kind both major channels constantly churn out in depressing Mal Young-type quantities. Transmitting them during the summer recess would make sense if they were appreciably worse than Young's own brainchildren, *Harbour Lights* and *Holby City*. But they aren't, and *Life Support* may even be marginally better (at least it's *about* something). No, both air in graveyard slots because they are from BBC Wales and BBC Scotland. It's traditional to air Welsh and Scottish shows around now, whether or not they are any good. They have to be made, in order to show everyone that the BBC is a national organisation. But they don't have to be given a decent slot, so they aren't.

What is so sad is that the much of the drama output from BBC Wales and Scotland used to be quite distinguished — and when it wasn't, at least it was recognisably Welsh and Scottish. But even that isn't an option any more. To try to break through London's intransigence, Wales and Scotland must now produce series that could have been made anywhere by anyone, and if they can star displaced Londoners, so much the better. And so come *Jack Of Hearts* and *Life Support*, two anonymous and derivative series that no one will watch and that no one will miss when they aren't recommissioned. New drama series! At the height of summer! Bring back the repeats!

'Couch Potato'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

The Artist Formerly Known as Prince Edward

MEDIA NEWS

WHILE media attention was focused on his successor, John Birt quietly appointed his most slavish lieutenant to a top job.

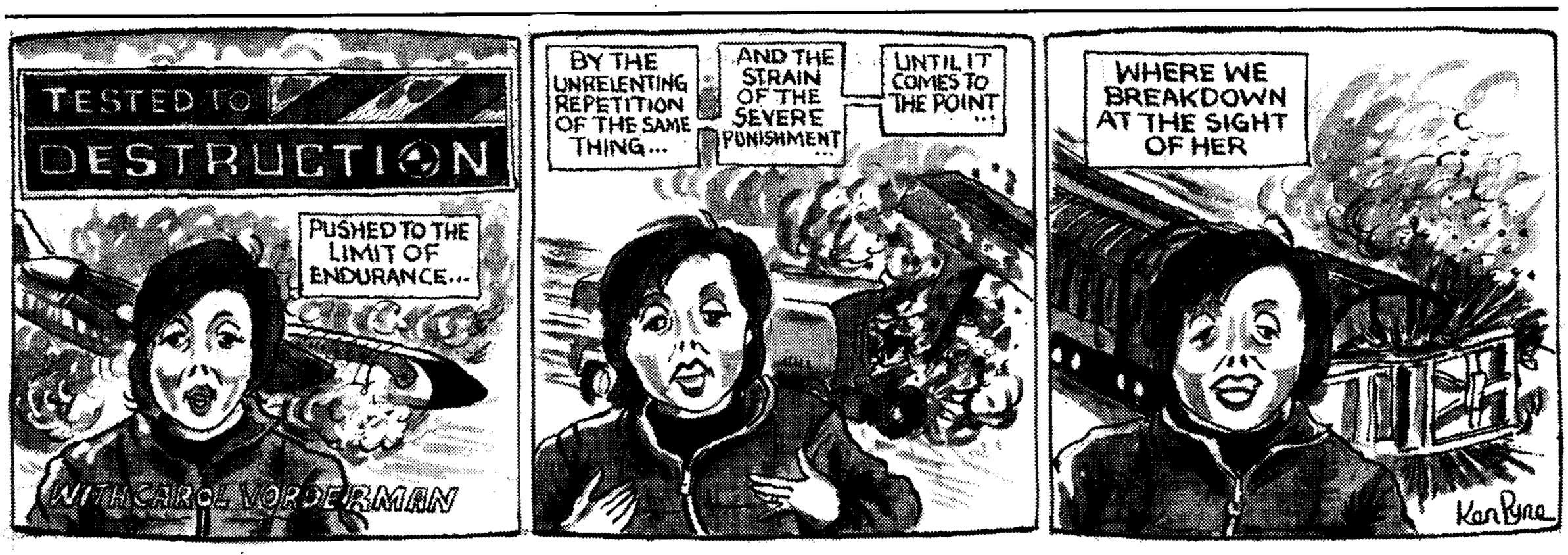
Margaret Salmon – often likened in personality and style to her namesake Margaret Thatcher – has been made chief executive of Resources. As with Birt's own appointment as director-general, the job wasn't advertised and there was no appointment board.

The Resources directorate covers all of the BBC's technical and engineering staff, most of whom are employed by a wholly-owned BBC company, Resources Ltd. But Salmon has no technical background, nor has she ever managed a business operation. She is a personnel officer by training whose promotion appears to be a reward for imposing Birtocracy in her previous job as director of personnel.

Given that Greg Dyke might want his own director of personnel, charitable BBC staff wonder if Birt wished merely to secure her financial future. Salmon only joined the BBC in 1991, from a personnel job in the Burton Group, and to be eligible for a big Beeb pension she needs to put in 10 years.

Conspiracy theorists have a more sinister interpretation: that she has been sent in to bring about the privatisation of Resources Ltd, which was mooted by Gavyn Davies's recent BBC funding review.

There's also a mystery about how the Resources job became vacant in the first place. It was previously held by "bonking" Rod Lynch (*Eyes* passim), who left suddenly and without fanfare. Corporation spokespeople will say only that Lynch, who was chief executive of a failed airline before joining the BBC, has gone "to take up a senior position in aviation".

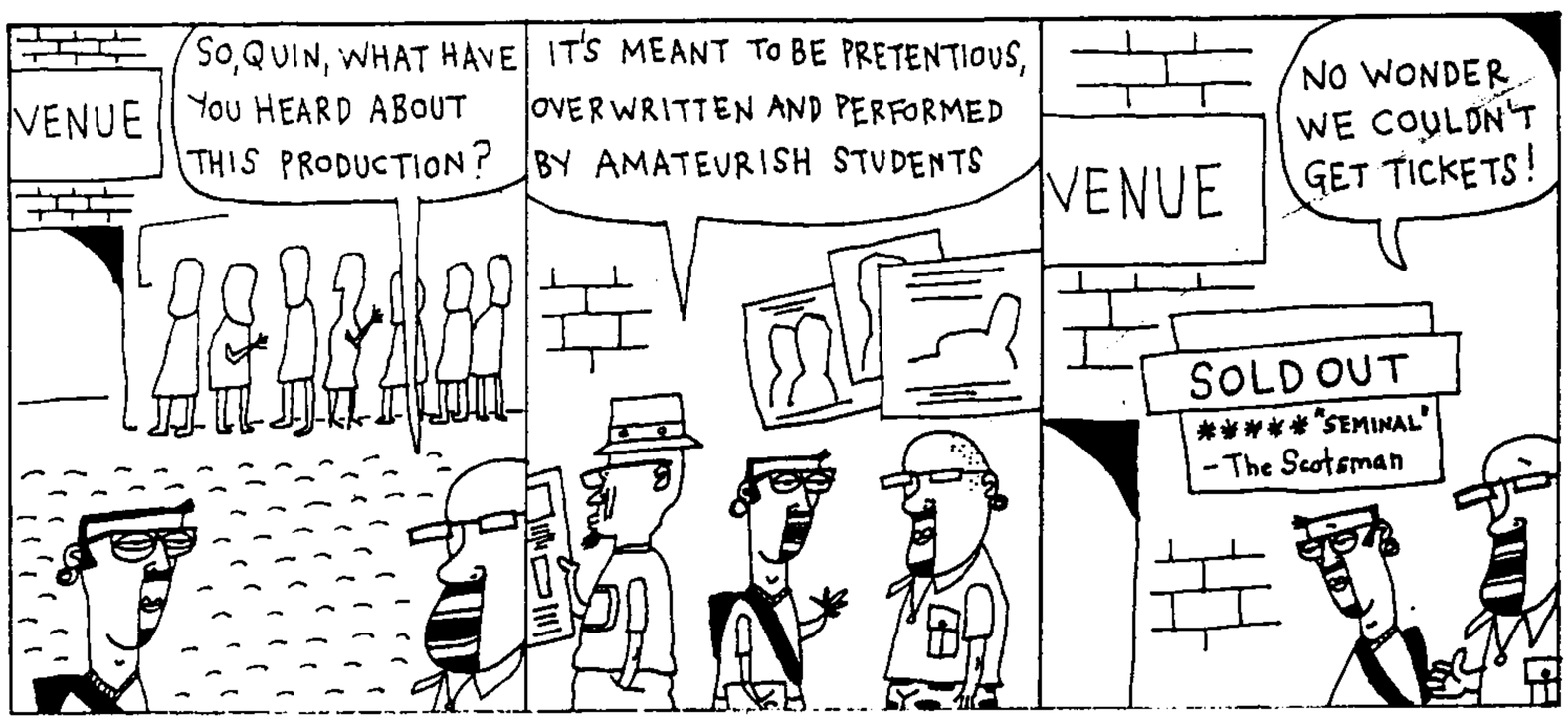

TESTED TO DESTRUCTION
PUSHED TO THE LIMIT OF ENDURANCE...
WITH CAROL VORDERMAN
BY THE UNRELENTING REPETITION OF THE SAME THING...
AND THE STRAIN OF THE SEVERE PUNISHMENT...
UNTIL IT COMES TO THE POINT...
WHERE WE BREAKDOWN AT THE SIGHT OF HER
Ken Pyne

STAFF at BBC World Service, still reeling from the latest cutbacks introduced by Mark Byford which will lead to 20 percent redundancies in some departments, are not impressed by the use of funds elsewhere in the corporation.

Every member of staff has just received an individually-addressed mailing containing a glossy leaflet from BBC Resources. It details the safe way to use a mobile phone while at the wheel of a car, a guide to "best voicemail practice" and the "key points of principle when purchasing goods and services".

Neither the leaflets nor the accompanying letters from various heads of Telecoms and figures from the mysterious Corporate Centre, detailed how this was relevant to the hundreds of staff in office or studio-based jobs who received the packs but never have occasion to travel by car or communicate by mobile, and certainly do not have the authority to purchase anything on behalf of the BBC. Too much risk of them wasting money on expensive paraphernalia no one really needs, you see.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON – UP NORTH KNIFE & PACKER


VENUE
SO, QUIN, WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION?
IT'S MEANT TO BE PRETENTIOUS, OVERWRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AMATEURISH STUDENTS
VENUE
NO WONDER WE COULDN'T GET TICKETS!
SOLD OUT
*****"SEMINAL" -The Scotsman

OH, YEAH? A NEW COLUMN OF AMAZING FACTS

"Government appraisers had said that without projection, the Zapruder film was a strip of celluloid wound round a plastic reel."

— The *Times*, 4 August

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

TO celebrate Sir Simon Rattle's appointment at the Berlin Philharmonic, EMI Classics has proudly released one of his last recordings with the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra: "Szymanowski – Krol Roger."

Surprisingly, however, there is no picture of the maestro on the sleeve. Instead, the CD front cover features a semi-clad Grecian god who is in fact one of the pretty young things from the classical marketing department, one Thomas Kaulrich. The back cover is an equally sparsely clad Chris White, assistant in the EMI press office.

It is not until reaching page 70 of the inlay booklet that one at last finds a photo of the man of the moment, Herr Rattle – fully clad, thank God.

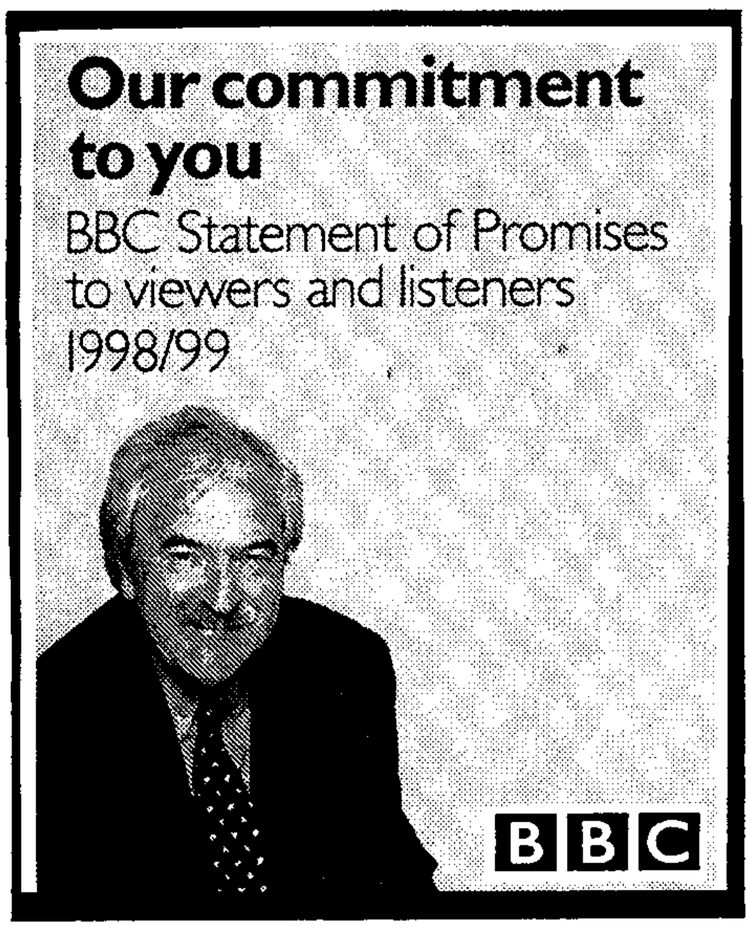
QUESTION: When is a compliment for a geriatric "wrong note" composer not a compliment? Answer: When it is offered by another geriatric "wrong note" composer.

The best efforts of Pierre Boulez in a recent BBC2 documentary to praise Sir Harrison Birtwhistle's orchestral dinosaur *The Triumph Of Time* notably failed. Of the music he remarked: "It 'as a sort of brutality which is zee limit of what you can make... and, I must admit, suffer"; and he added: "At zee end you 'av zee ears resting" and then, less reassuringly, "Zee ear regurgitates".

Even the photographer filmed taking press photos was less than helpful. Sir Harrison suggested a pose. "Let me play the piano."

"No, no," the photographer is heard to reply, "don't play the piano."

JUST FANCY THAT!



POLICE 5

INSPECTOR Knacker has been having difficulty attracting new recruits to the Metropolitan police following the force's damnation by the Lawrence inquiry.

Numbers signing up at the Metropolitan Police Training College in Hendon are substantially down. The last three intakes this year totalled 293, compared to 535 last year.

Efforts at ethnic minority recruitment are even worse. An open day at Hendon attracted barely a handful of prospective Asian recruits. Perhaps they had heard about the instructor there who was recently given a "Stage 3" warning over racist remarks. He apparently said to an Asian recruit: "I suppose your parents own a corner shop."

Meanwhile attendance at training days on the Met's new anti-racist policy is now mandatory for serving officers. But even there comments made by a sergeant chairing one of the sessions showed how far the force has really come.

"We all generalise," he explained to his charges in a conciliatory manner. "It's something we can't help. It's like every time you see a Chinese person, you automatically think of... a restaurant."

AFTER a wait of nearly 18 months, the preliminary hearing of the employment tribunal brought against the Metropolitan Police by Sgt Gurpal Virdi finally took place on 4 August.

Virdi was arrested and suspended in April last year on trumped up charges of racism after he complained that a racist stabbing he had investigated was not registered as a racial incident.

The tribunal's chairwoman J.R. Hill made it clear from the start that there was no point in Virdi setting out to prove that institutional racism exists in the Met saying "We know what has been said" in the Macpherson inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

Instead Virdi argued that he had been subjected to a racist "climate" throughout his period of employment, accusing his superior at Ealing, chief superintendent James Howard, of repeated racism towards him. The tribunal decided that allegations of racism towards Virdi after Howard arrived at Ealing in 1995 can be used as background evidence.

It has been very difficult for Virdi to argue his case because all his documents were seized when his house was searched on the day he was arrested. His home was searched for six hours by a POLSA team, which usually investigates terrorists.

Police evidence on the other hand included documents such as a draft letter addressed to Howard, which Virdi had decided not to send, taken from his computer at Ealing police station and dated 20 March 1998. Virdi says he never printed the letter which means his terminal was being accessed long before his arrest on 15 April.

Virdi told the tribunal: "I was arrested because of the influence of this person Mr Howard." He alleged that Inspector C, who in 1997 was head of the POLSA team at Ealing, was a close friend and fellow lodge member of Inspector X, who led the search of his home. Inspector C reported to Howard, who was chief superintendent at Ealing until he moved to the complaints investigation bureau (CIB) this year.

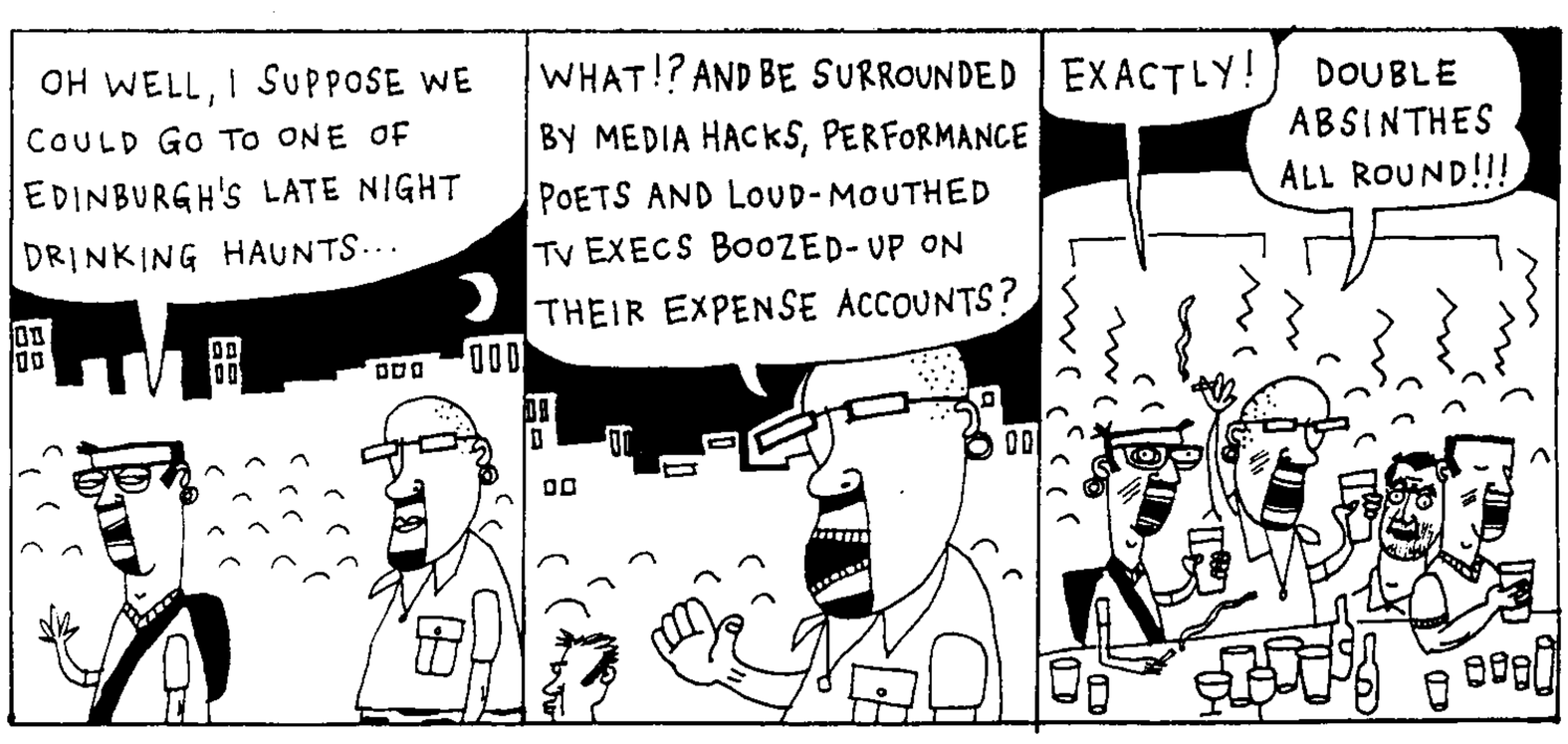
The Met is holding its own disciplinary hearing against Virdi starting on 6 September. This means the full employment tribunal will not take place until November at the earliest and could even be delayed until next year, leaving almost two years between Virdi's suspension and his chance to put his case.

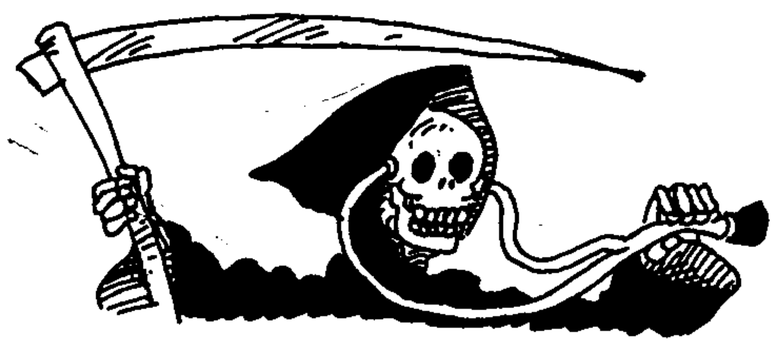
PETER MOORHOUSE, chair of the police complaints authority (PCA), continues to fight recommendations that an independent investigative force should be brought in whenever allegations are levelled at the police.

The latest "unease" about police officers investigating themselves was expressed by Judge Gerald Butler in his damning report into the crown prosecutions service's (CPS) handling of cases involving suspicious deaths in custody, including that of Richard O'Brien (see last *Eye*).

In response, Mr Moorhouse went on BBC's *Newsnight* to say that police expertise was needed for such investigations and that concerns about bias might be overcome by ensuring that investigations were always carried out by officers from a different force to the one under suspicion. That was apparently a PCA recommendation to the home affairs select committee.

Curious, then, that the PCA has just approved a Metropolitan police officer to inquire into the sudden death in custody of Sarah Thomas. The 34-year-old architectural student died last week after being arrested and detained by Met officers operating out of Stoke Newington.


OH WELL, I SUPPOSE WE COULD GO TO ONE OF EDINBURGH'S LATE NIGHT DRINKING HAUNTS...
WHAT!? AND BE SURROUNDED BY MEDIA HACKS, PERFORMANCE POETS AND LOUD-MOUTHED TV EXECS BOOZED-UP ON THEIR EXPENSE ACCOUNTS?
EXACTLY!
DOUBLE ABSINTHES ALL ROUND!!!



DOING THE ROUNDS

WHICH of the following NHS employees is not eligible to join the lucrative NHS pension scheme? A receptionist, a cleaner, a part-time gardener or a full-time, fully qualified locum GP seeing 40 patients a day? Yes, it's the GP.

In autumn 1997 the National Association of Non Principals (NANP, which represents GPs who are not partners in practices), lobbied Mike Farrar and Sarah Bird, then in charge of NHS pensions, and demanded that all qualified GPs doing the same work should be eligible to join the scheme irrespective of their employment status.

In April 1998 the NHS Executive agreed "in principle". In May 1998 Bird pledged her "urgent attention" to the matter. Fourteen months later the department of health has failed to act and GP locums are still out in the cold.

Nearly a fifth of all GP consultations on the NHS are with GPs who don't have a business interest in the surgery premises. Many locums are needed to work in several surgeries in any week to cover the absence of the usual GP. Many GP partners only avoid burn-out by using locums, and the government's health reforms have increased the need for locums. GP partners are becoming increasingly tied up with administrative duties and primary care groups, and it's the locums who treat the patients. Health minister John Denham's ludicrous argument is that locums are technically self-employed and thus not part of the NHS. So why do they spend their lives treating NHS patients, writing NHS prescriptions and making NHS referrals?

The exclusion of locums particularly discriminates against women, who now make up more than half of newly qualified doctors. Many don't wish to commit to a partnership because they want to have a family or because their partner's job is not static. The NHS has huge problems retaining female doctors, especially GPs, and patients want to see more of them. Yet the government will only let them have a pension if they buy into premises. Thousands of women GPs have lost out on their NHS pension because they couldn't contribute for the years they were raising their families.

Although there are concerns about the performance of a small minority of locums, on average they are more likely to have a higher professional qualification than usual GPs and a wider range of experience because of their work in different surgeries. Their work is hampered because many health authorities won't provide them with a copy of the *British National Formulary* (*BNF*), the single most important manual to aid safe prescribing; they are denied access and funding for post-graduate education; they don't receive computerised feedback about their prescribing or urgent circulars from their health authority. Despite this, they provide a generally excellent service. GP locums will have to undergo the same GMC revalidation as all other doctors, many are board members in the government's primary care groups and the NHS would collapse without them. So why should they be the only workers in the entire NHS not to receive a pension?

● AN INVESTIGATION has been ordered into the quality nationwide of surgery for pituitary tumours (at the base of the brain) after allegations made to MD.

As with the Brompton case, the whistleblower concerned chose to go direct to the *Eye* rather than the GMC. The results may be a while coming, but in the meantime anyone considering such surgery should ask to see an audit of the amount of tumour removed (hopefully large) and the likelihood of visual defects after the operation (hopefully small).

● FOLLOWING the *Eye*'s exposure of the unsatisfactory external inquiry into Hammersmith hospital's radiology department (*Eyes passim*), health secretary Frank Dobson is set to announce another one. This will be the *third* and should finally address widespread allegations of cover-up and the victimisation of those who spoke up, such as Prof Peter Dawson and Dr Walter Curati.

● EARLIER this month Mr Dobson visited the paediatric intensive care unit at St George's hospital, Tooting. Staff were warned he was coming but the ward clerk, not recognising the name, assumed he was a patient and made up notes for him.

M.D.

DOWN ON THE FARM

NOTHING has made more of a mockery of the supposed lifting of the European union (EU) ban on British beef exports than the attitude of our German "partners".

They sternly refuse to accept the lifting on the grounds that they do not trust the complex monitoring and control system put in place by the British Government to ensure no BSE-infected animal could ever get into the human food chain.

Much amusement has therefore been caused in "DGVI" in Brussels by an unpublished internal document reporting how BSE monitoring and control works in super-efficient Germany. A commission investigation found that Germany has no proper system at all.

"There is no central computer recording of animal movements at federal, state or local level," the report finds. When it comes to controls on specified risk material getting into animal feed, "the German authorities do not foresee to date to apply the provisions of Decision 96/449/EEC to by-products and waste". Under the relevant German law (or Tierkorperbeseitigungsgesetz), "these materials are currently often diverted to the feedstuffs industry".

When it comes to BSE itself, although "BSE was made a notifiable disease" under the Tier-seuchengesetz or animal diseases act, "there is no legal definition of BSE or suspicion of BSE in Germany" and "there is no uniform active surveillance specifically geared towards BSE".

When BSE was confirmed on one German farm, it was conveniently discovered that most of the "ecologically reared, high-quality beef animals" were of British breeds. This was taken as letting Germany off the hook, even though it was difficult to discover precisely where the animals had come from, since "some of the documents contained handwritten changes, reportedly to correct initial recording errors".

It is comforting to know that when Britain is lectured by the Germans on the supposed inadequacies of its BSE monitoring and cattle traceability system, the pious criticism comes from a country which really knows what it is talking about.

● A FINE old spat is raging in *Meat Trades Journal* over whether Britain has made a complete idiot of itself in hiring hundreds of Spanish and other foreign vets to supervise its meat plants at such a cost that British abattoirs are closing down in droves.

At the root of the argument is whether senior Maffia veterinary officials deliberately misinterpreted the word "veterinaires" in EU legislation to create more jobs for vets. There is a widespread view, apparently supported by a speech made in Budapest in 1997 by Dr P. van Velterop, a senior EU official, that the Maffia went over the top in claiming that this meant all meat plants had to be supervised by fully-qualified "veterinary surgeons". They could have complied with the legislation much more cheaply and efficiently simply by reclassifying existing British environmental health officers as "veterinaires".

Back in April *Meat Trades Journal* printed an open letter making this point to agriculture minister Nick Brown, written by food safety expert and former environmental health officer Dr Richard North. Only this month came a reply, defending the Maffia line and savaging North, from a distinguished, supposedly independent vet Dr J. Gracey.

But Gracey made a revealing tactical slip. He claimed North's article had quoted Velterop's speech. In fact the only place where North had referred to the EU official's views was in a personal letter marked "private and confidential" written to food minister Jeff Rooker. It was clear from Gracey's article that a copy of this private letter had been leaked by the Maffia's senior officials in the hope that Gracey could be used to rubbish North in his guise as an "independent" expert.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

Milk quotas

EVERY year a thrilling game takes place, run for the benefit of dairy farmers by the intervention board (IB).

It is called "Guess if there will be a superlevy", and those milk producers without enough owned milk quota — inevitably the financially hard-pressed — have the fun of deciding whether to gamble their livelihood on the result.

It works like this: each producer must have enough quota to cover their sales on pain of superlevy – a fine worth substantially more than the milk. But in years when the country as a whole is under quota, no levy is applied, so there is a chance that milk production will actually be free of quota. Since quota costs around half the value of the milk, this is quite a temptation. In addition, when production is "under profile" during the year, quota becomes much cheaper. And vice versa.

Among the many twists to make the game interesting, milk for quota purposes is not straight volume but must be adjusted for butterfat content. Each parcel of quota has a "butterfat base" and you need more or less quota depending on your actual butterfat. See? Then there is a "national butterfat base", which can trigger an adjustment of everyone's milk when — well, never mind.

The upshot is that when the farmer gets time from trying to make a living from milk at 15 pence per litre, there are two more jobs to amuse him: firstly trying to work out exactly how much milk he will actually produce in the year ahead (how many cows will get ill, what the weather will be, etc, etc); and second, deciding when and if to pay much of his turnover into a volatile and speculative market for quota.

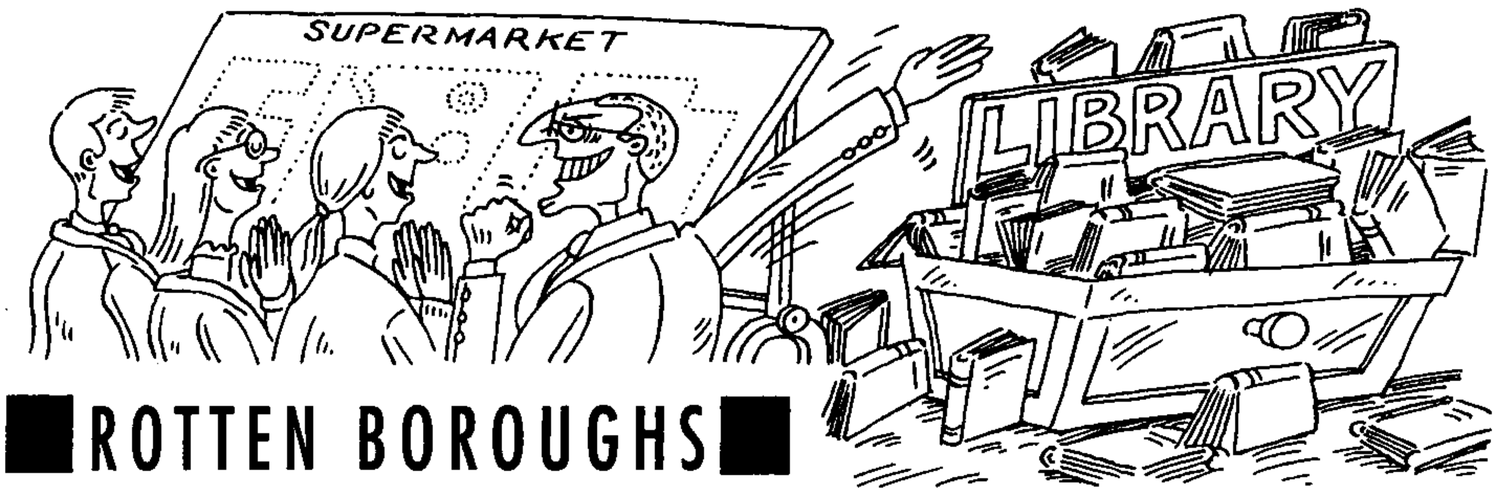
The result is a gripping drama as month by month the IB releases the production figures and farmers and pundits try to guess whether the UK's 14 billion litres of milk will end up a few litres over or under quota. Such is the fascinating life of those who choose to work on the land.

There is just one more slight twist and that is that the IB's figures are... junk. Four months now after the end of the quota year, and to widespread disgust, it has just announced yet another error: an upwards revision of 21 million litres, resulting in a £9.3m superlevy — after a year when production appeared to everyone to be safely under quota. The management of the figures is variously described by leading quota brokers as an "absolute sham" and a "total cock-up".

The IB always denies failing to make proper checks, however. Presumably that is why a manager in charge of the collation of statistics was sacked in May for... failing to make proper checks.

'Gumboot'

"I suppose it had to happen — genetically modified crop circles"



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

WAGES OF SPIN

IF EVER Tony Blair should fall out with Alastair Campbell, he need look no further for a loyal spinner than Mark Covell, the Labour party's northern area press officer.

When the *Observer*'s Nick Cohen rang Covell to discuss events at Doncaster council, Covell poured oil on the choppy waters of Labour's biggest recent local government scandal: "What we're talking about is personal expenses being forged. There's no suggestion I have seen of planning abuses."

Covell started to get excited when Cohen pointed out that police have already arrested six people in Doncaster for alleged involvement in, er, planning fraud. He became particularly agitated when Cohen reminded him that Labour had been warned about its latest convicted Doncaster expenses fiddling councillor, Steve Judge, by Donnygate whistleblower Ron Rose.

He alleged that Rose, a TV scriptwriter and former Doncaster councillor, owed vast sums in taxes, echoing an earlier smear by Doncaster North MP Kevin Hughes, also a former councillor, who has been spreading the lie that Rose owes the taxman £30,000 (the actual figure is £6,000). Covell once told another journalist that Rose was "deranged", saying: "Do you know where Rose is today? He's in Paris, sniffing around for dirt on Di and Dodi. That's the kind of man he is." Which was a rather spectacular interpretation of the fact that Rose was working on a script about the Di-inspired campaign against landmines.

The continuing smears have confirmed Rose in his belief (see *Eye* 979) that the only way to stop Labour's campaign of disinformation against him is to resort to m'learned friends. Meanwhile the party led by a man who wrote on becoming prime minister "There is no room for sleaze in the new Britain... I am determined to drive out the small minority who besmirch local government" continues to, er, besmirch the name of a man whose only crime was to be naïve enough to believe those fine words.

JUST SAY KNOWSLEY

MEANWHILE across the Pennines there was disappointment among scouse-ologists last week after Millbank supremo Margaret McDonagh turned down a request from 13 Labour councillors to investigate their own council — Knowsley, near Liverpool.

"Notorious" Knowsley has been likened to a third world, one-party dictatorship. Complaints include victimisation, unaccountability and the sale of council land at knockdown price to property developers. A recent development has been the practice of appointing people with little or no experience to well paid committee chairmanships.

Knowsley's Labour councillors — 64 out of 66 members — have been controlled under a heavy whipping system for the past 13 years by 72-year-old leader Jim Keight. His chair of planning has held the post for 10 years in succession and the chair of policy and resources for 13. In some areas elections are uncontested, which means councillors are returned without anybody having to vote for them.

Toeing the Keight line can earn a councillor up to £15,000 in salary and allowances. Keight himself comes in at number seven in the top 10 earning council leaders, being paid more than £22,000 last year. It all adds up to a rotten borough *par excellence*.

The Knowsley refuseniks were hoping for an official Doncaster-style investigation which could result in the end of Knowsley as a borough, with it being gobbled up by a Liverpool "super council". But perhaps Millbank has decided one Donnygate is quite enough.

Knowsley was under threat before, in 1990, because the population decline it suffered during the recession endangered its viability as a local authority. A successful "Save Knowsley" campaign was then spearheaded by chief executive David Henshaw. He is opportunely making a sideways move to become Liverpool's chief executive in October (see *Eye* 981). Can Knowsley long survive his departure?

ANTI-SOCIAL SERVICES

GOVERNMENT inspectors have paid Hackney social services their second visit in 18 months to check that things have improved since the days when Mark Trotter, who died of Aids, buggered boys in his care despite the council knowing that he posed a serious risk (see *Eyes passim*).

The inspectors' report, which makes grim reading, found that the council is still failing to comply with its statutory duty to inspect children's homes and that police checks on staff working in homes are still not routinely undertaken. The failure to check Trotter was one of the contributory factors which allowed him to abuse his position — and his charges — for 12 years.

The inspectors also found that Hackney has failed to monitor those children's homes where recommendations were made following their first visit in February 1998. Despite the lack of improvement in social services, in the current year the children and families section is on course to overspend by £2.8m, eclipsing the £908,000 overspend last year.

Lisa Christensen, head of social services, has quit and is to become director of social services in Lambeth (see *Eyes* passim). No doubt her experience and skills are just what Lambeth needs.

DEBT'S THE WAY

DESPITE "new" Labour's best efforts, the Tories still like to think of themselves as the natural party of business. Kent Tories certainly do.

When they regained control of "their" county council in 1997 after an impertinent interval of Lib-Lab control, they set out to reduce the council's horrendous £497m debt by an ambitious programme of property sales. The target for 1998-99 was £40m. Alas, since the council's "corporate services business plan" was published in March last year, property sales have raised a mere £10.1m and the property panel is now on to its third chairman.

The Tories' first spectacular property triumph was the non-sale of 24 old folks' homes (see *Eye* 972). They managed to sell just nine for a price close to that of renovating the remaining 15. In June the council flogged off its old Springfield premises to office leasing company Moor Peak Ltd for the knockdown price of £5m. This was £6m less than a rejected offer for the site from supermarket chain Asda, and £2m less than the council has paid for replacement office space next to county hall.

So how is the debt reduction programme going? The council is now a magnificent £585m in the red — £88m more than when the Tories announced their businesslike plans to balance the books.

● **LEWISHAM'S Bellingham ward councillor Ron Stockbridge has not found life easy since being deposed as chair of the policy and resources committee after the local elections of May 1998. Stockbridge, realising his "old" Labour views are not really the height of fashion these days, has decided to try to arrest his slide into oblivion by setting up the "South London Union of True Socialists" — which makes a catchy acronym that is bound to rouse the masses of Lewisham from their slumber.**

He arranged to meet his old friend Margaret Moran, MP for Luton South, in the Commons for a drink to celebrate the formation of, er, SLUTS. Alas, Ron got lost in the Palace of Westminster's labyrinthine corridors while trying to find his way back from the lavatory, was apprehended by a security guard, and shown the door.

Pseuds Corner

We were playing a drunken, late-night game of charades on holiday a few years ago. One of the party acted out Diana, a duck and a cake. Everyone got it immediately. It was griddled foie gras on a sweetcorn pancake at Kensington Palace.

ALICE THOMSON
The Spectator

Ferdinand Magellan's 1519 expedition was man's first successful circumnavigation of the globe and one of the most important journey's [sic] ever undertaken, leading man out of the dark ages. And so it is with Magellan clothing. Quality and style that break through the myth of expensive prices for designer labels; and, instead, bring to you classic, value clothing with a touch of adventure.

Clothing label

And then they score — they score — and, fuck me, it's Sheringham, you couldn't have written it. So that, in itself, whatever you think of Sheringham, you think, Christ this is like fucking Boys' Own stuff, isn't it? And Blessed is so excited he's practically pissed

himself, so he's had to go to the loo, when suddenly we're going, 'Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!' The dogs are fucking flinging themselves out of the fucking window 'cos they're thinking, God, somebody's being killed. Blessed comes back with fucking stains all over his fucking trousers, couldn't fucking believe it. Missed the second goal, couldn't believe it. He was practically fucking suicidal. It was fantastic.

KENNETH BRANAGH
Guardian

I'm unequivocally standing on my own two feet, and facing my demons externally and internally.

I take vitamin B, for anxiety, and St John's Wort, the herbal Prozac.

I eat spinach and gingko for memory. I swim every day.

I'm on a new phase of my journey, in a very creative, fertile space.

I work at home, and my life is integrated, balanced, focused...

When I meet someone and fall in love, which hopefully I will, and we want to have children together, I'll be so much better placed because I'm nurturing myself and being my best friend, really.

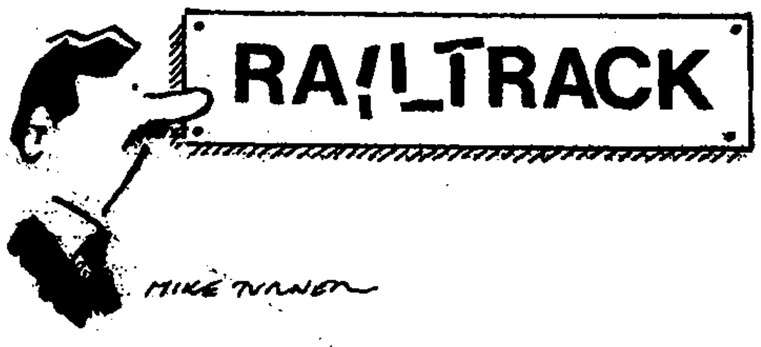
HELEN WILKINSON
The Times

The strategy adopted by the European Commission to achieve its aim of making a large impact at European level is to focus on a number of objective driven Key Actions (KAs) for each programme, with supporting generic activities. Within the Competitive and Sustainable Growth Programme further concentration will be achieved through the publication priorities for each call. These are described in the Workprogramme, which will be revised for each major call, and will be achieved largely through the definition of Targeted Research Actions (TRAs) for KA1 on Products, Processes and Organisation, and Technology Platforms (TPs) for KA3 on Surface Transport and Marine Technologies and KA4 on Aeronautics. A list of well defined tasks supplied in detail as a separate document will be available for KA2 on Sustainable Mobility and Intermodality.

DTI letter signed by Trevor Fraser, 'Head of the UK's delegation to the Competitive and Sustainable Growth Programme'

CONTRIBUTORS: Phil Cardno, Grant Cornwallis, Michael Carlson, Maurice Fitzmaurice, Anon.

£10 paid for entries



SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on independence

LAST week's decision by John Prescott that Railtrack must accelerate installation of the train protection warning system (TPWS) highlights again the lack of independence in rail safety.

Prescott is under the illusion TPWS will prevent trains passing any red signals, as would the automatic train protection (ATP) system advocated by the Railway Inspectorate after the Clapham Junction crash in 1988. In fact TPWS is not as foolproof as ATP, which is in daily use overseas (and on Chiltern Railways and the Heathrow Express). The reason most British passengers are now having to accept a cheaper, diluted version — many years after ATP should have been installed — is that the Railway Inspectorate has not had the courage to stand up to governments since it was absorbed into the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

The Tories solemnly promised to implement ATP in full but spent the money instead on privatisation. The HSE said nothing. Similarly, complete privatisation of BR might have been derailed had the HSE stuck to its guns over another important conclusion after Clapham: that old slam-door trains should be eradicated by 1998. The Tories had agreed to this too, but the HSE *consented* when the commitment was dropped in the interests of a quick sale before the Tories left office.

Prescott is unwilling to criticise the HSE or even the Tories on this. He was delighted to announce last month that the government was demanding replacement of all those old trains by 2005, two years earlier than the 2007 "originally recommended" by the HSE; there was no mention of the *original* original deadline of 1998.

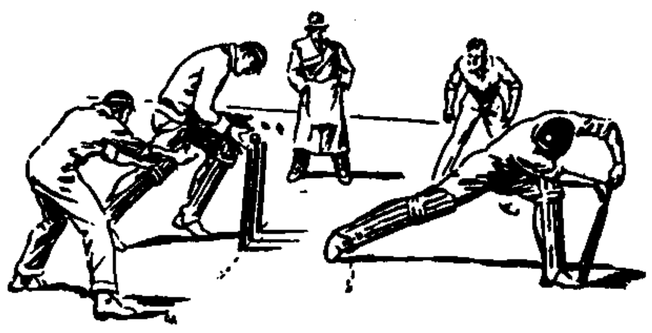
While a weak HSE bends in the political wind on the one hand, on the other Railtrack, the greedy privatised utility, is still entrusted with implementing rail-safety policy. Railtrack directors insist the company's safety activities are separate from its commercial ones, but this hardly ties with the evidence.

When Railtrack regulates the "safety cases" of other companies there is no question of cost-cutting. This may be the right attitude, although there have been complaints of new trains being delayed as engineers jumped through the hoops for Railtrack, which wanted to ensure it would not be held liable in the event of an accident.

But when the referee also kicks the ball around – as when Railtrack manages its own safety-related activities – the company cuts outrageous corners to save money. It has a policy of patching up old components which need replacing and of "tolerating" decay in signalling cables (*Eye* 977). Rails in the Severn tunnel (*Eye* 979) became so unsafe a 20mph speed limit was imposed in May.

And there is no sign of change. The new railways bill does not include powers for the Strategic Rail Authority to take over Railtrack's safety duties. But the Southall inquiry, which will show how ATP was handled by various bodies, may add weight to calls for rail safety to be managed independently of government and shareholders.

'Dr B. Ching'



CRICKET NEWS

IT's a tough job being chief spin doctor for the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) but Richard Peel does his best. "Key messages" are faxed regularly to the media and a "monthly communication explaining and clarifying issues" is sent to everyone on the ECB mailing list, including the all party parliamentary cricket group.

According to Peel all is well with the game. He used the *Eye*'s letters page in issue 980, for instance, to rubbish our preposterous suggestion (*Eye* 978) that this summer's world cup had been less than a roaring success.

From its television and marketing revenue last year, it is true, the ECB distributed £28.1m to the 18 first class counties plus MCC and the Minor Counties Cricket Association (MCCA). It's roughly an equal share-out, though counties who supply test players get slightly more. MCC, not exactly the most cash-strapped institution, does particularly well, pocketing both its share of the TV money (about £1.13m last year) plus £160,000 in rent from the ECB whose swanky new offices occupy what was once the members' car park at Lord's. Other cricket bodies share in the ECB's largesse including those hard-up universities at Oxford and Cambridge.

So, with all that dosh swilling around, all's well. Right? Er, actually, no. Without this ECB handout no county cricket club would exist – and if "Team England" (as the ECB wants us to call the butterfingered blunderers currently being stuffed by the Kiwis) doesn't start winning matches, TV executives may wonder if English cricket is worth the £103m C4 and Sky paid for the current contract.

County cricket depends on the TV money, most clubs having turnovers well under the ECB salary bill of £5.2m and struggling to break even. Not even the big counties with test grounds would survive without the TV income. Yorkshire turned in a profit of only £68,361 last year – down 50 percent on 1997 – and only the ECB's cheque for £1.25m kept it alive, dwarfing the £450,000 raised from membership subscriptions.

The ECB annual report presents county cricket through the spinner's rose-tinted specs, boasting that 526,000 people attended championship matches last year. That's less impressive when you realise there are more than 100,000 members of county clubs so each one, on average, turned up for less than five of the 1,244 scheduled days of play. Take members out of the picture and you see that championship cricket is dead. Lancashire, one of the best-supported counties, attracted only 6,258 paying customers all last season. The big Roses clash at Headingley lured just 1,400 bodies, although that was somewhat better than the 29 die-hards who paid to watch Yorkshire play Cambridge University.

1999 was supposed to mark the bright new dawn of English cricket. Remember the world cup? Well, the carnival atmosphere failed to ignite when England got booted-out after the first round, and the hard-pressed county clubs are being made to bear the cost of the ECB's shattered dream. Each county (plus MCC and MCCA) was promised a share-out of 15 percent of world cup profits estimated at £14m. That worked out at £105,000 each (in addition to the annual TV cheque) and equivalent to a lottery win for the smaller counties. Some spent it in advance, like Sussex who invested £180,000 to become the only club with permanent floodlights. But now the counties have been told to expect a maximum of only 5 percent from a smaller surplus. Final figures aren't yet available but £11m seems likely, giving each county just £27,500. Derbyshire has written to its members to express its unhappiness while Essex, which has lost more than 600 members this season, is forecasting a loss of £50,000.

The ECB does have some help in selling the game. Nasser Hussein, Team England's captain, writes a weekly piece for the *Sunday Telegraph*. Before speaking to his "ghost", assistant sports editor Paul Newman, Hussein checks out what the England management committee (one of the bureaucratic ECB's 19 divisions) would prefer him to say via Brian Murgatroyd, Peel's deputy and a committee member. Once Hussein has spoken to Newman and the piece is ready, the *Telegraph* runs it past Murgatroyd *again* to receive the ECB's *imprimatur*, eventually allowing Hussein's photo and byline to accompany it.

So when Hussein next pleads in his column: "I'd like to repeat, this is not the captain of his country making excuses or whingeing," you'll know he's telling the truth.

Letters

Waspish

Sir,

Fame at last! My very own review in the Eye. So, my pathetic attempt to appear even slightly hip by sprinkling my novels with semi-contemporary musical references has finally been rumbled. I'm only surprised you missed my embarrassing assertion that Alanis Morissette is American (she's Canadian).

I shall be renewing my sub in due course with quiet pride...

With best wishes,
IAIN 'Finally Arrived' BANKS,

Fife.

PS: My wife points out that given the last words of the review there is every chance the paperback edition of "The Business" will sport the quote "'Post-modern genius' — Private Eye" — Doh!

Gallant Garry

Sir,

Thank you for intruding into my private life. You state that I "walked out" on my wife and three children. Two of these children are adults, one of whom lives with me.

You dub my beautiful, talented fiancée "gormless" on the grounds that she is blonde. How very liberal.

You say I am old enough to be her father. Yes, if I had impregnated her mother when I was 13.

Finally I can't take credit for the lyrics of Nemesis. They were written by punk poet Garry Johnson and are clearly a satire on anarcho-punk witlessness.

Other than that...

GARRY BUSHELL,

Via fax.

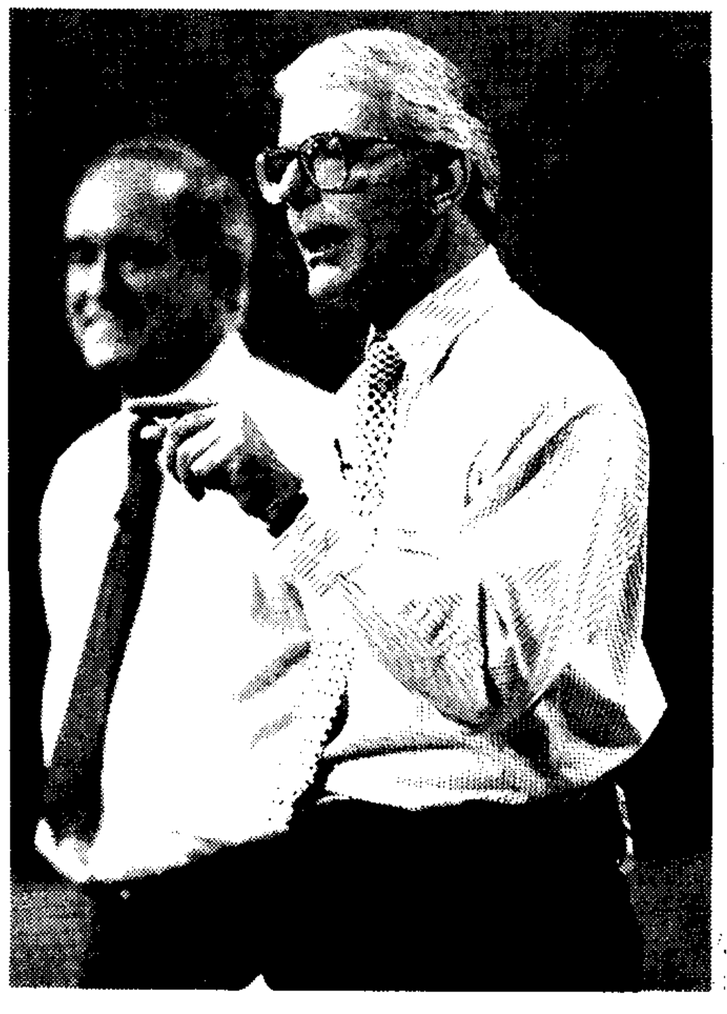
PM's Willie?

Sir,

Janet Street-Porter's opinion about John Major's dick (Eye 981, Street of Shame) can be easily verified by examining John Major's crotch in the picture on page 5 of your own inestimable organ No 909, dated 18th October 1996 (or is he just pleased to see Mawhinney?).

Yours faithfully,
C. HARDY,

Darlington.



Fuggin' rubbish

Sir,

You compared Mr Fayed to "a common thief who rummages around in wastepaper bins" (Eye 982). How could you?

*Assuming that he has been in possession of goods stolen from Private Eye (ie, your waste), you might have considered comparing Mr Fayed to a **handler** of stolen goods under s22 of the theft act 1968, as the police have explained to you. This would be more appropriate and is potentially more serious. Anyone convicted of theft can only be sentenced to a maximum of seven years' imprisonment, whereas a person convicted of handling can get up to 14!*

So unlike Private Eye to miss an opportunity such as this. I hope it doesn't happen again.

Yours faithfully,
R.C. McDERMOTT LLB (Hons),

Lecturer in law, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.

Sir,

May I suggest a simple solution to your recent problems with rubbish? While perusing an unsolicited catalogue of office requisites ("Your favourite office products, for less — overnight!"), I learn of the Compact Deskside Shredder, yours for £49.98 — barely three uncancelled subscriptions.

Such a machine will not necessarily stop Mohamed Fayed fuggin' about in your dustbin, but it will give the Egyptian haberdasher hours of harmless fun trying to glue all the strips back together so he can continue reading your letters.

Yours, unimpressed by the
Harrods Summer Sale,
ALLAN LLOYD,

Colwall, Herefordshire.

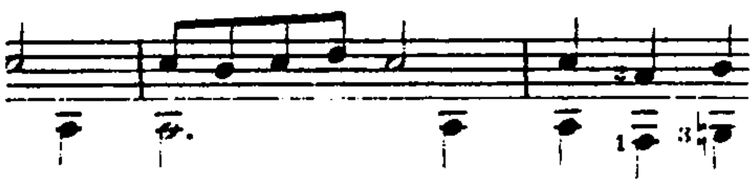
Sir,

On looking through a book of 16th century music I came across the enclosed piece dedicated by the composer to the wife of his patron. Do we find evidence here that your Egyptian friend may have had distinguished forebears after all?

Yours sincerely,
ERIC CROUCH,

Thame, Oxon.

Madame Fugger's Dance

Melchior Neusidler
Edited by Karl Scheit

Sir,

I understand Mr Fayed is collecting rubbish. Each day my family and I produce lots of varied, interesting and in the case of my two year old possibly unique items and I would be happy to pass these along to help him in his endeavours. Of course I would not like this personal material to fall into the wrong hands so I wondered if I could trouble you for the address of his private office?

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL J. EVANS,

Colne, Lancashire.

Punch drunk

Sir,

Just when I felt your organ could not sink any lower, I was shocked and disgusted to read your editor's public confession that he reads Punch magazine, without I noted any apology for his actions. I suggest that as an appropriate punishment for this act he has his British passport withdrawn!

Yours fuggingly,
ALAN GILLMAN,

Via e-mail.

Graun but not forgotten

Sir,

Your account in Street of Shame suggests that Martin Walker's departure from The Guardian was the result of office politics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nor was it true that "the two sides agreed there were no charges to answer".

As you point out, there is a confidentiality agreement which means that we cannot comment on the details beyond saying that in our view Martin Walker's conduct involved a major breach of trust. That was the issue that led to his resignation.

Yours sincerely,
BRIAN WHITAKER,

Managing Editor, The Guardian.

Egg on face

Sir,

Re: "Down On The Funny Farm". We are writing with regard to the above article in which you rubbish the credibility of the Lion Quality mark on egg packs.

Please be advised that the Lion Quality symbol is the registered trade mark of the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC). It can only be applied to egg packs by packers who are registered with and have signed a licence agreement with the BEIC. The licence agreement requires them to follow the Lion Code of Practice.

This code of practice requires that all egg producers providing Lion Quality eggs to registered packers, and their suppliers, eg pullet rearers, chick hatcheries and feed mills have to be registered with the BEIC and be subject to independent audit. All registered packers, producers, pullet rearers, hatcheries and feed mills are within the UK. The code provides full traceability of eggs back to laying flock.

Thus the Lion Quality Mark guarantees that all eggs sold under it are produced in the UK and are produced to significantly higher standards of hygiene and animal welfare than required by UK or EU law. Our Lion Quality egg producers account for 70 percent of UK production.

Yours sincerely,
EMMA POWELL,

British Egg Information Service.

Unguarded comments

Sir,

So much for Dr B. Ching's inside information. Railway station staff are not guards (Eye 982). London Underground calls them station assistants.

A guard is — or was — someone in charge of a train and responsible for its safe operation: a job now abolished on most routes and its functions dumped on the increasingly-stressed driver.

This point of pedantry may be remembered with a traditional verse which I was told when I was a train driver:

The guard is the man
Who rides in the van
Which is found at the rear of the train.

The driver up front
*Thinks the guard is a c**t*
And the guard thinks the driver's the same.

Yours sincerely,
HUGH JAEGER,

London W12.

Small ads, big problem

Sir,

Private Eye is a fine publication. It is clever, funny, witty, upstanding, crusading and moral. Until you get to about page 30, where the adverts start, and then it all goes badly wrong.

Who's this bald bloke with the surveillance problem? Why would your readers need pure urine for 4 to 5 hours? Who are these sad sacks who want money but don't apparently want to work for it, and why are you giving advertising space to these amoral sneaks who specifically state they wish to cuckold their spouses? The words "discreet" and "confidential" crop up over and over again, it's all superficial, cheap, shallow and depressing.

Why should your journalistic standards stop at page 30? Don't you feel you have at least some responsibility for this sleazy underworld you advertise? Why do you print this crap? I, for one, would gladly pay a higher cover price if you didn't.

Yours sincerely,
DR PHILIP M PEVERLEY,

Via e-mail.

PS: Any sexy slim rich woman fancy a bit on the quiet? North-east but will travel if you pay for me. Discreet and confidential.

Lookalike

Ex-PM

Gay Icon

Sir,

I have just come across this picture of Lady Thatcher. She is so like Quentin Crisp that I wonder if they are related...

R. NORRIS,

Beeston.

Yorkshire bitter

Sir,

Labour MP John Gunnell defends his connection with Yorkshire Fund Managers (982) saying he is only paid £2,000 per year for occasional meetings. But as he says, these meetings have taken up just 20 hours so far this year. Even if we assume that figure doubles by the end of the year, it leaves him being paid £100 per hour. What a cushy little number!

Yours faithfully,
MARK PACK,

London N4.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

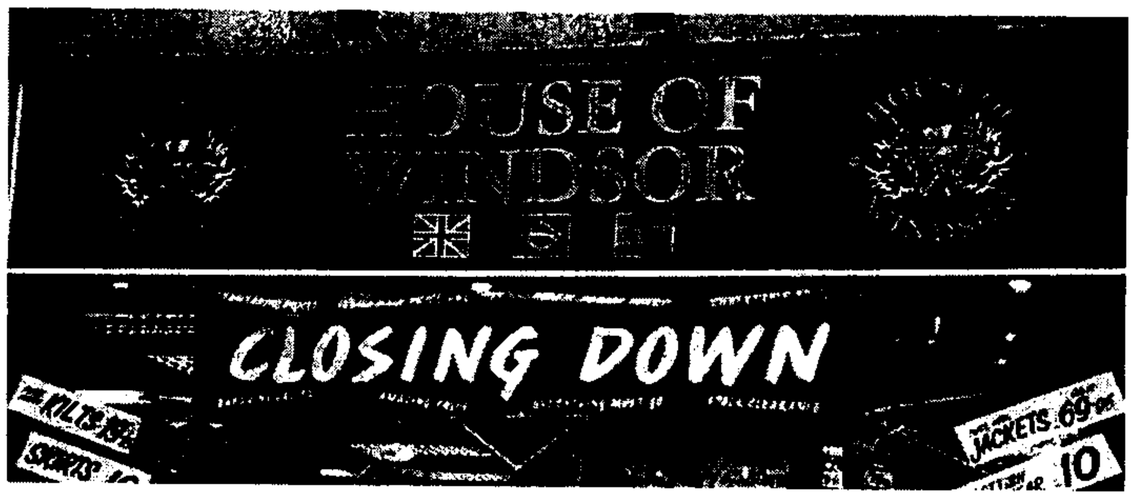
JERRY HALL FINDS A NEW LOVE....
ALRIGHT, SO HE'S NO WILD, SEXY ROCK STAR....
...BUT IT'S TIME I GREW UP AND LOVED A MAN FOR THE RIGHT REASONS - HE'S GOT SO MUCH MORE TO OFFER THAN MICK!
YOU MEAN KINDNESS AND SENSITIVITY?
NO, £13.7 BILLION. .....MUCH MORE THAN MICK!

I-SPY

£10 paid for submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Wigmore Street, London *(right)* submitted by **Andrew Denny.**

Ross on Wye *(below)* submitted by **Glynis J. John.**



Timorese beasties

Sir,

Your reference to the great and the good on the DTI's new "Competitiveness Council" (6 August) failed to set down the full extent to which British Aerospace has had its aircraft used in barbarism in East Timor by the Indonesians. After the Indonesians' unprovoked invasion, Falantil, the East Timorese resistance, fought the Indonesians to a ceasefire despite facing overwhelming odds. Over the course of the ceasefire the Indonesians acquired British made Hawks and US made Broncos, both ground attack aircraft. They then broke the ceasefire and the East Timorese were bombed and napalmed for 24 hours a day.

Two hundred thousand East Timorese lives have been lost through this repression after a regime of terror was imposed on this small former Portuguese colony. It seems that the justification for the exporting is British jobs, but must we buy jobs with the blood of innocents? The Hawks are still being exported, despite the puff of the all-singing, all-dancing humanitarian Labour government's pronouncement that they will stop.

With the naivety of Neville Chamberlain facing Adolf Hitler, the Labour government has accepted the undertaking from the Indonesian military, butchers of three quarters of a million Indonesians after the Soeharto coup and 200,000 deaths from torture, starvation and murder in East Timor, that the Hawks will not be used to repress the civil population. A week or so back one flew over the capital of East Timor, Dili, in a clear attempt at intimidation.

ROGER WILLOTT,

East Timor Support group: UK.

Mommie Dearest

Sir,

Re: Eye 982 Letters page re: Dead Kennedys. I feel I must comment on the letter from Mrs Angry of Goring By Sea. She obviously does not understand or appreciate satire. I know this to be true... because she is my Mother!!

Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID WYNN-DAVIES,

Lancing, West Sussex.

Don't be mean

Sir,

In lecturing MD on the difference between "average" and "median" Dr Alex May (Letters, 982) makes the common error of confusing "average" and "arithmetic mean". In correct usage "average" is a non-specific term for any measure of the central tendency of a distribution, including its median.

Since the "average" referred to by MD is a notional statistic, it is not necessary to assume it must be an arithmetic mean. In any case, a large proportion of heart surgery units will be classified as "below average" whichever measure is used, and whether that proportion is exactly half, or 40 percent, or 60 percent, is beside the point that MD was making.

Yours faithfully,
DR RICHARD A'BROOK
(Statistician),

University of Dundee.

PS: Dr May refers to MD as "he/she". Is he/she the only Eye reader in UK medical research who is unaware of MD's identity?

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The door is now open, what we have to do is push it fully ajar."
ELLIOT MORLEY MP, ITV
(John T. Lavis)

"Marion Jones was not flying with all her engines blazing."
STEVE CRAM, BBC2
(Barry Ingham)

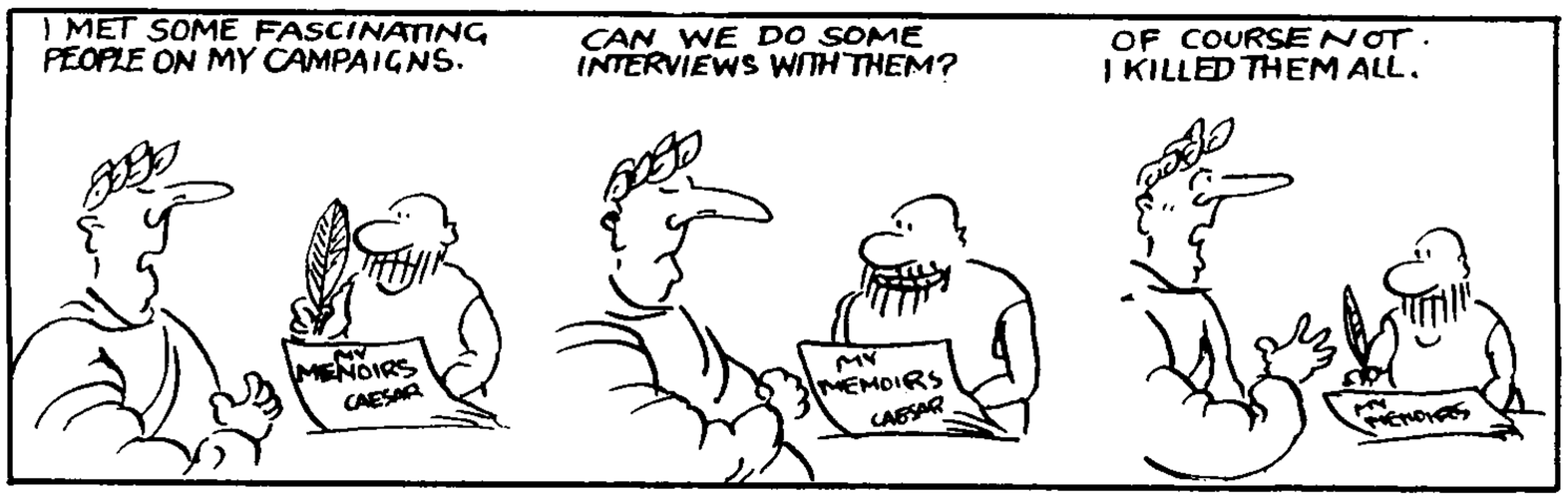
"In Australia we have a word to describe their [the Pakistan cricket team's] way of playing; 'laissez-faire'."
Commentator, BBC
(Carl Puttnam)

"...at this stage of the season I just tell the players to get points under their bags."
GEORGE GRAHAM, Radio 5
(Keith Campbell)

"Well, Harry, fifth place last year, how can you better that?"
FERGUS SWEENEY, 5 Live
(Neal Cresswell)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN


I MET SOME FASCINATING PEOPLE ON MY CAMPAIGNS.
CAN WE DO SOME INTERVIEWS WITH THEM?
OF COURSE NOT. I KILLED THEM ALL.
MY MEMOIRS CAESAR
MY MEMOIRS CAESAR
MY MEMOIRS

HIV negative

Sir,

I could not agree more with the acerbity of your comments on the Euro gravy train (Eye 982, 9), the immorality of those who choose to live by it, and the hypocrisy of those who preach so-called "morality" to others while practising an alternative lifestyle themselves. But where is the relevance of the HIV status of Tom Spencer's "gay lover"? Surely this man's state of health has nothing to do with the apparent deceits and greed of his partner. Please stick to what's relevant when you give us all the dirt.

Yours faithfully,
REV DR C.J. HAMMOND,

Sandy, Beds.

Public service broadcasting

Sir,

While it may still be considered fashionable by your some of your correspondents to consider Channel 5 to be a channel solely of sex and cheap tat, I will say that I watch a damn sight more programmes on Channel 5 than I ever do on that truly dire monstrosity known as ITV. Indeed, I have also found this to be the case for many of my peers.

As for the, ahem, sexy output of Channel 5, I believe (so I am told) that this performs a valuable public service for married couples, something which is not available by other terrestrial channels.

Yours,
DR DUNCAN CAMPBELL,

Via e-mail

A revelation

Sir,

Re: Paisley Patter, page 9, Eye 982, about the number of The Beast. According to you it's in "The Book of Revelations in the Old Testament". Is this connected in any way with the singular Revelation of St John the Divine in the second half of the Bible, which, last time I looked, was called the New Testament? I once nearly had a motor car with the number 666, except the new numbers list jumped inexplicably from 665 to 667. How beastly.

REV BOB MAITLAND,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike lookalike

Sir,

Oh, how I despair.

The highlight of my alternate Wednesdays is to come home at nightfall, manfully rip off the thin plastic coating that shields my Private Eye from the ravenous advances of the postman and then wallow in the bliss that is the "lookalike" part upon the letters page.

Imagine my dismay then, that as many as 50 percent of those in the current issue, ie... er, one, are callously stolen from Q magazine, who highlighted (hi-lit?) the similarity between Mick Hucknall and Rembrandt in their August issue.

As, in the usual tradition of Q, that had been on sale since probably the middle of February, the comparison is as old as an old thing.

David Desborough, submitter of said lookalike, you are a purveyor of second hand goods.

And, Private Eye, you are the sperm of Beelzebub, as that literary genius Paula Yates might have once said. Or not.

Furthermore I, Sir, am distraught with grief,

SIMON,

Via e-mail.

Chap acquitted

Sir,

I was deeply disappointed that you didn't have an appropriately offensive cover to mark the demise of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Junior. Please provide one soon so that I can continue my subscription graciously.

Yours faithfully,
ULTAN Ó BROIN,

San Francisco, USA.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● "Dear Sir, I am a keen naturist and came to Spain mainly for the weather where I could better pursue my interest rather than in Birmingham which is not known for its sunshine. I managed to find a very secluded spot in which I could indulge my sunbathing and did so on a number of occasions undisturbed. To get to the location I was of course dressed.

"Unfortunately, on the last occasion whilst *en naturel* [sic], my clothing and possessions were stolen. This left me with a rather difficult two-mile walk home through an urbanisation. I met up with the local police who rather than pursue the thieves, arrested me on some trumped-up indecency charge and were very

rude indeed. Despite my telling the complete truth to the court about my finding the vibrator, I had to endure the experience of the local prison, albeit it rapidly improved my otherwise poor understanding of the Spanish language.

"This happened last September, and I have only recently been released. I write this to prewarn any fellow naturist who might be tempted to indulge. Don't. Yours sincerely, A K Ardeley Moraira." (*Letter to Costa Blanca News, 30/4/99. Spotter: R Mackichan)*

— ● —

● **"I first had the idea about a year ago, when a friend asked me to dye his two dogs for a fashion show," said Eric Gonzalez, owner of the Urban Pets salon in New York. "I dyed one blue, and the other one violet, and I liked the effect so much that I went straight home and dyed my white cat pink. The neighbours were so thrilled that they asked me to dye their cats too. It didn't stop there. I dyed rabbits, mice and even bats. I realised I'd found my vocation."**

The Urban Pets store has been doing brisk business since it began advertising its "dye your dog" facility last year. "The cost ranges from $73 to $138," said Gonzalez, "and the vegetable dye lasts about three weeks. It's non-toxic, like food dye, because cats tend to lick their fur. For Halloween, we did orange, we did green, we did pink like a fuchsia, and we did purple. Last Christmas, we could have dyed your dog red, to match this Santa Claus hat, and we turned several white cats a most exquisite shade of green. We've just been busy getting the pets ready for St Patrick's Day. Green was extremely popular, of course, and we're now planning for Easter. I'm considering pastel shades, like pink, yellow, and blue.

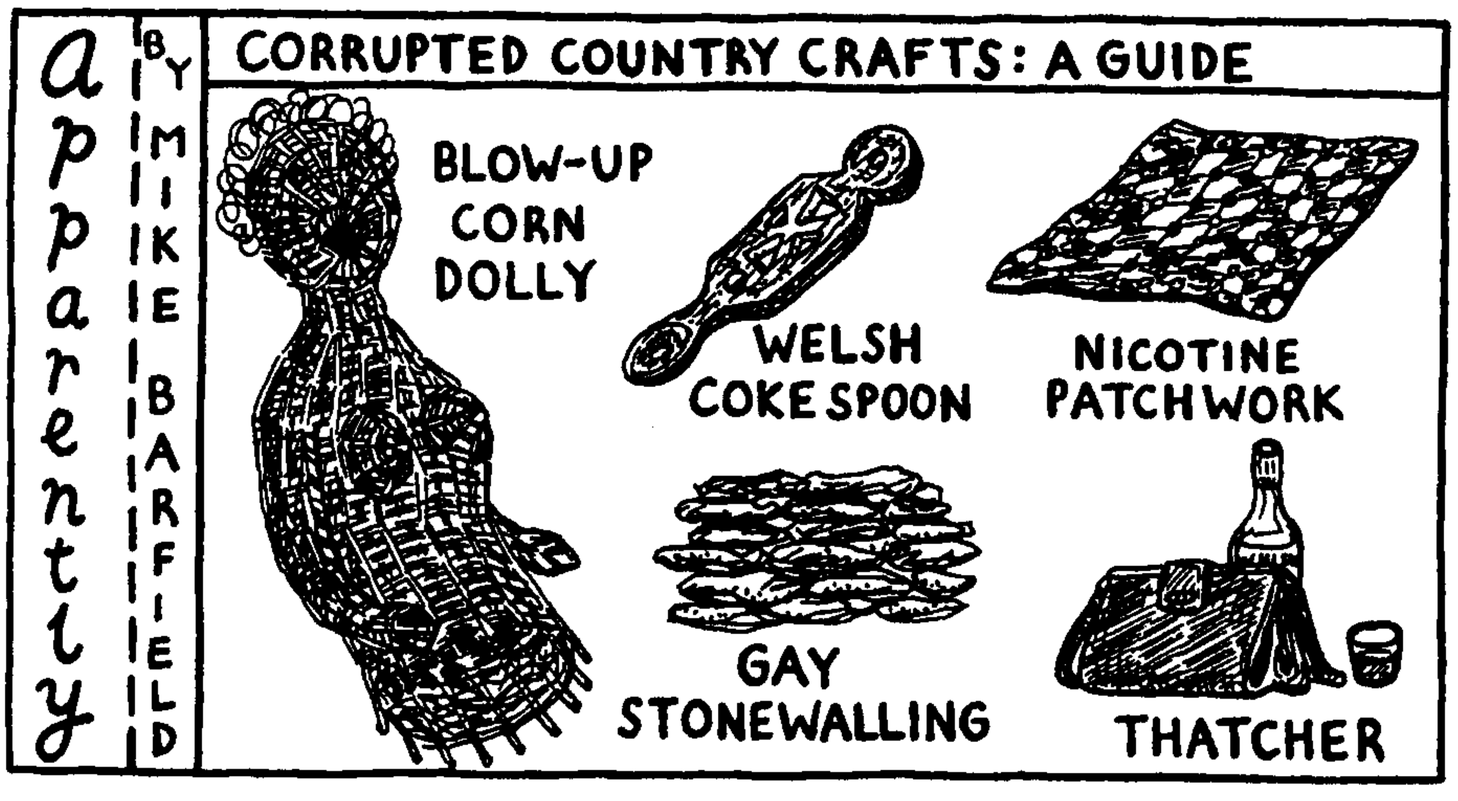
"Yes, we've had a few telephone calls from outraged animal rights activists, but what are they complaining about? Ok, we made a mistake with the chameleon, but that was just a joke that went wrong. I checked with a veterinarian, who assured me that the dyes are safe. But if people don't want to colour their animal, we have other things that might interest them. How about this toothbrush for the family cat, with some poultry-flavoured toothpaste? Or some cat cigars and cat brandy? And best of all, how about these remote-controlled mice?" *(Food Processor, April/May 1999. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

— ● —

● *"I take a few calculated bets now and then, on things like the stock market, and I thought I would win this bet too," said Paias Wingti, after being fined A$300 by a Brisbane court. "But I was obviously wrong, and yes, I now know just how effective the Australian police force is."*

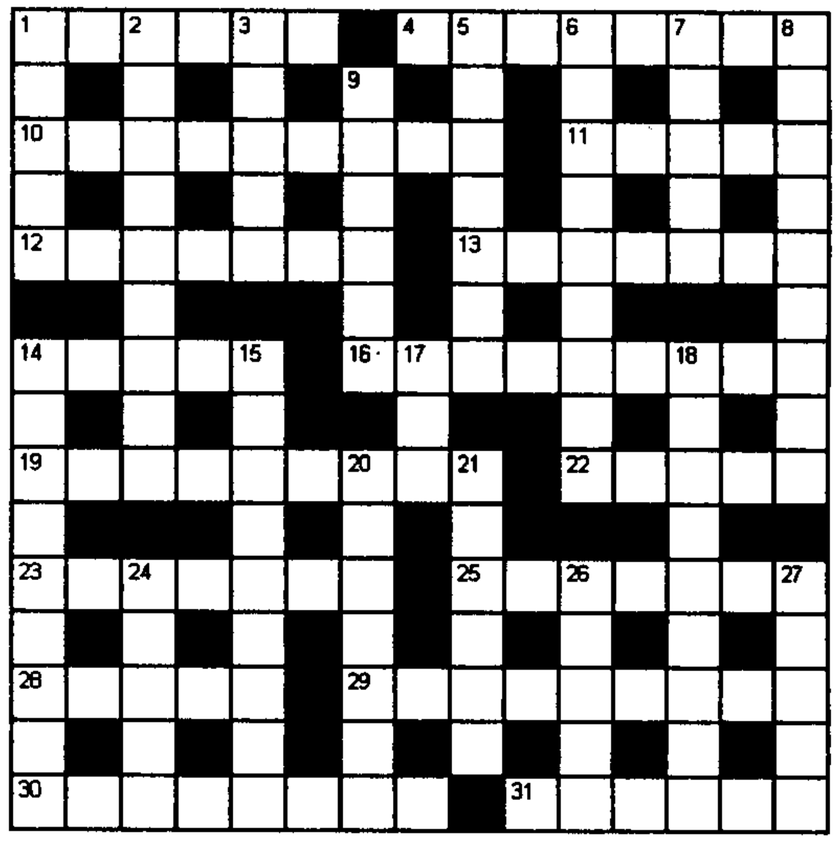
Wingti, a visitor from Papua New Guinea, earlier told the judge that his problems stemmed from a bet he had made with friends during dinner in a restaurant at the Valley in Brisbane. "My lawyer friend told me that Australian police were fighting prostitution by disguising women officers as prostitutes. He pointed out a young girl in jeans standing across the street, and bet me $1000 that she was a police agent. I said I didn't agree, and accepted the bet. To prove them wrong, I approached the girl and talked to her. But as soon as I mentioned that I was willing to pay, she pressed a button and three policemen appeared and arrested me.

"Unfortunately, I had forgotten for a moment that I am deeply religious and the former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. I am very embarrassed by the whole incident, but really, it was just a bet that backfired on me." (Papua New Guinea Post Courier, 18/5/99. Spotter: Dr Mark R Leach)



EYE CROSSWORD 138

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Look, be a luvvie about speed and 'soft' Ecstasy (6)
4 Sarah's one who can easily manage a whole football team (8)
10 Sunday attire has promise? Bollocks! (5-4)
11 Shaft Woody's ex? F-off! (5)
12 Tart's joke on bloke (7)
13 (see 29)
14/31/9 Reportedly, Cindy's new boss shows one in aircraft the way to drink (5,6-6)
16 ER's to make changes in government ... (9)
19 ... Post-Prince Charles, for instance, we hear (5,4)
22 What's the betting Steven Spielberg's full of it? (5)
23 One who strikes you as a bit of a slut? (7)
25 Massive thug screwed Gloria and left (7)
28 (see 29)
29/28/13 London transport cut comes down to blonde at bar on street (9,5,7)
30 Robin's entourage of pissed board members (5,3)
31 (see 14 ac.)

DOWN

1 Pass oneself off as a flipping fabulous writer! (5)
2 Labour required to end this state and deliver? (9)
3 Utter 'bollocks'? (5)
5 Sticks scatter nudes holding Brenda up (7)
6 Appreciation of a dig utter rubbish (9)
7 Minister's unsightly protuberances on getting erection (5)
8 Edward and Sophie of late, encountering hitches (5-4)
9 (see 14 ac.)
14 Jack and Brenda married, imbibing American beer in holy place (9)
15 Extraordinary communication: "Healey, TT, cracks and swallows pint" (9)
17 Biblical character captured by Israelis (3)
18 Not part of the staff that's unleashed on prick (9)
20 Note to bishop: before the watershed, remove certain bits of the text (7)
21 What's left after member gets head from Alice by city limits? (6)
24 Annoyance of someone who shags topless (5)
26 Rent again – student hides in tree, shaken! (5)
27 Behind on English model is an advantage (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 27.8.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 137

Winner: GRANT NIGHTINGALE

ACROSS: 1 Cabbie 4 Orgasmic 10 Eclipse of the sun 11 Privateer 12 Syria 13 Old hat 15 Effendi 18 Insides 20 Cruise 22 Liszt 24 Airstrike 26 Mir Space Station 27 Township 28 Sexton .

DOWN: 1 Creepy 2 Balti 3 Impeached 5 Referee 6 Ashes 7 Misprints 8 Cannabis 9 Regent 14 Last Straw 16 Fruit cake 17 Diplomat 19 Saatchi 20 Corpse 21 Lennon 23 Tapes 25 Idiot.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

You may be wondering why my picture is at the top of this newsletter.

The Vicar has gone on holiday and has asked me to take charge of parish business while he is away, enjoying a well-earned rest after all the wonderful work he has been doing for us all.

A lot of my mates in the Working Men's Club have been asking "Hey, John, surely the Vicar is well enough off to pay for his own holidays. And his missus goes out to work as well, working up West in that legal firm, so she must have a few bob in the bank in her own right.

"So, why are they poncing off to some flash palazzo in Italy, at the expense of the Italian taxpayers?"

Let me make it clear, these were not my words. They are just what everyone else in the parish has been saying.

And although I don't necessarily agree with them, I respect their right to have their own opinions.

But I do think that a number of points should be made clear, just so that there is no misunderstanding.

For example, when the Italian police declared five miles of beach out of bounds to the public, so that Tony and his family could enjoy a little well-earned privacy, I am assured that this was not in any way Tony's idea, and that as soon as he realised that it was going to get him bad publicity, he stepped in at once and made it clear that in no way did he want to be given special treatment.

Similarly, you may have heard that the Vicar and his family were permitted to climb up the Leaning Tower of Pisa, something no one else is ever allowed to do, not even the Pope!

Well, all I can say is what a tribute to our Vicar that he is seen as someone so special, as opposed to all the thousands of ordinary, decent working-class people who go away disappointed.

Anyway, enough of all this carping about the Vicar's holiday arrangements, understandable though it is.

I think we all wish Tony and Cherie a good rest, and my message to them both, as I put through on the mobile, is that, since they went away, everything back here in the parish has been running

as smoothly as they could want.

So, as far as I am concerned, they should feel free to stay away as long as they like, and good riddance!

And, while I'm about it, there's another point I'd like to make, which is about the part played in parish business by Mr Campbell (no offence to our Editor, who is also, I am glad to say, on holiday!).

Nowadays, it seems to be the fashion for everyone of any importance to employ the services of "advisors" and so-called "spin-doctors" who go around spreading rumours and lies about decent folk trying to do their job to the best of my ability.

I do not think it is any of Mr Campbell's business whether I use hair dye or not, just because I am getting a bit grey around the temples, or when I occasionally use words in the wrong complex, just because they've all been to posh schools.

In my view there are too many pansies hanging around the back of the vicarage for my liking. No names, but all I can say is that if I was in charge, I wouldn't touch that Mr Mandelson with a barge pole.

Yours in Christian fellowship!

John Prescott,
pp. The Vicar.

A Warm Welcome To...

The Rev. Kennedy, who is to succeed our old friend Mr Ashdown as Minister in Charge of the United Liberal Democratic Reform Church.

JP writes: Congratulations to young Charles Kennedy, whom I am sure will do a good job, even though, not to mince words, he is only a small fish in a small pond. There has been a lot of talk about our two churches working more closely together, which is all very well, but if you want my frank opinion, we at St Albion's can get on quite well enough without them. Good luck, Charlie!

SUGGESTION BOX

Acting-Editor JP writes: "Some people have suggested that this parish newsletter could do with a bit of livening up. Amen to that! You should see some of the rubbish that gets sent in by would-be contributors, such as the poem we had last week on the Eclipse from Mrs Jay, the manager of our old folk's home.

The Eclipse

For a brief moment, the
world went dark,
Not a bird sang nor a dog did bark.
But then the sun came out once more
When Tony returned to his native
shore!

Can't we do better than that, comrades? How about a nice poem about the Working Men's Club?

Postcard From The Vicar

Dear John,

As you can see, we are here in Pisa for the day (That's not Mushy Pisa as you have down at the Working Men's Club!).

And look! As you can see, the famous tower is not leaning to the right or to the left. It is pointing straight up (the Third Way!).

I hope you will understanding the significance of this.

Tony

The Acting Editor regrets that it has not been possible to reprint the Vicar's entire postcard for reasons of space.

SHOULD LIB DEMS BE LEGALIZED?

by Our Medical Staff **Dr Thomas Splifferford**

A FIERCE debate was re-opened last night over the question of whether the Liberal Democrat Party should become freely available to the general public.

Said spokesman Charles Kennedy, "Thousands of people have experimented with Liberal Democracy at some stage of their lives, but few of them have become addicted."

GRASS ROOTS

He continued, "Many young people secretly try out the odd Liberal Democrat Policy but then as they get older they give it up."

However, opponents of the "Legalise Kennedy" campaign were quick to point out the dangers of allowing a third "hallucinogenic political party" to be legalised.

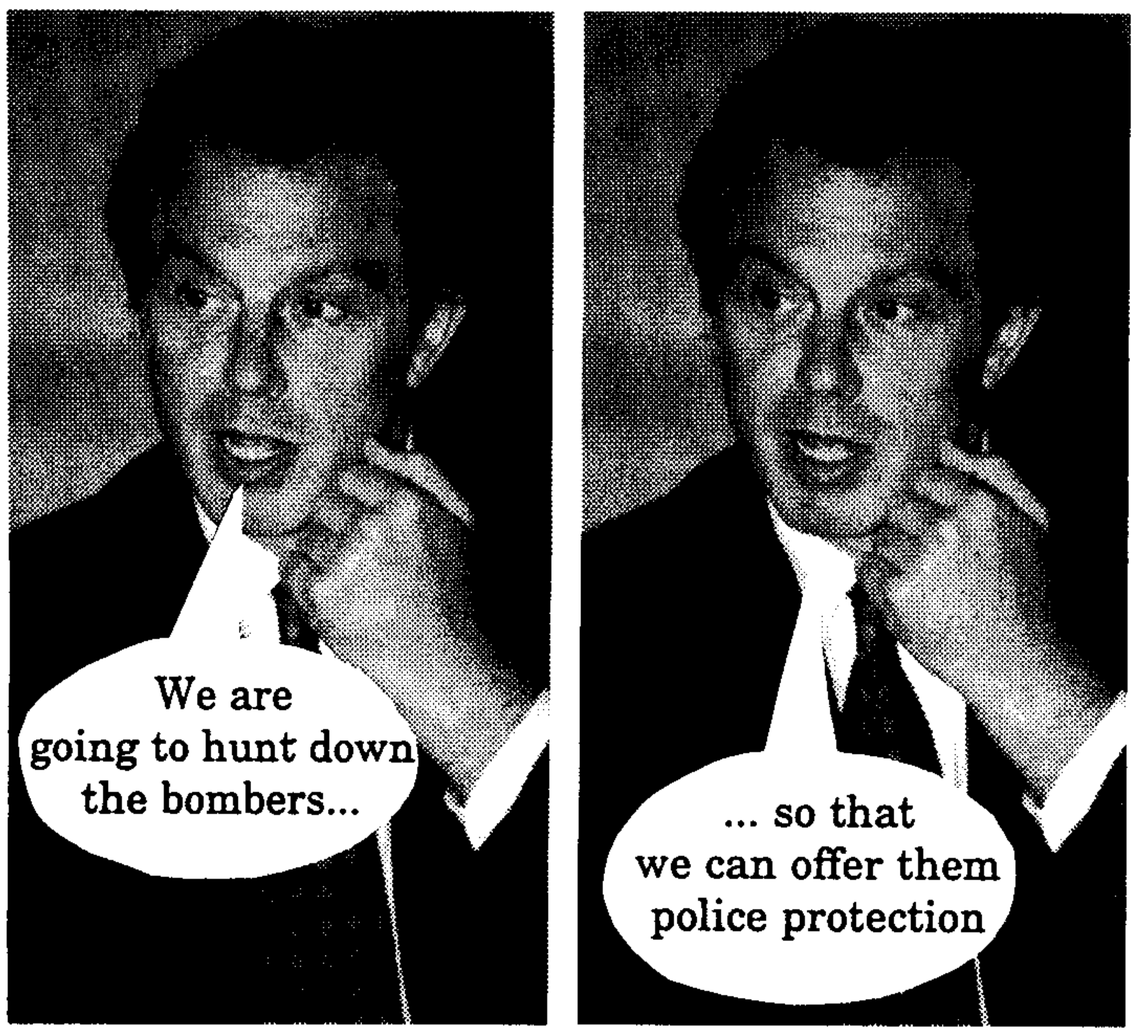
Said one critic, "We already have two dangerous parties on the market – Labour and Conservative. Are we seriously suggesting that we want a third? Especially when so little is known about the effects of it?"

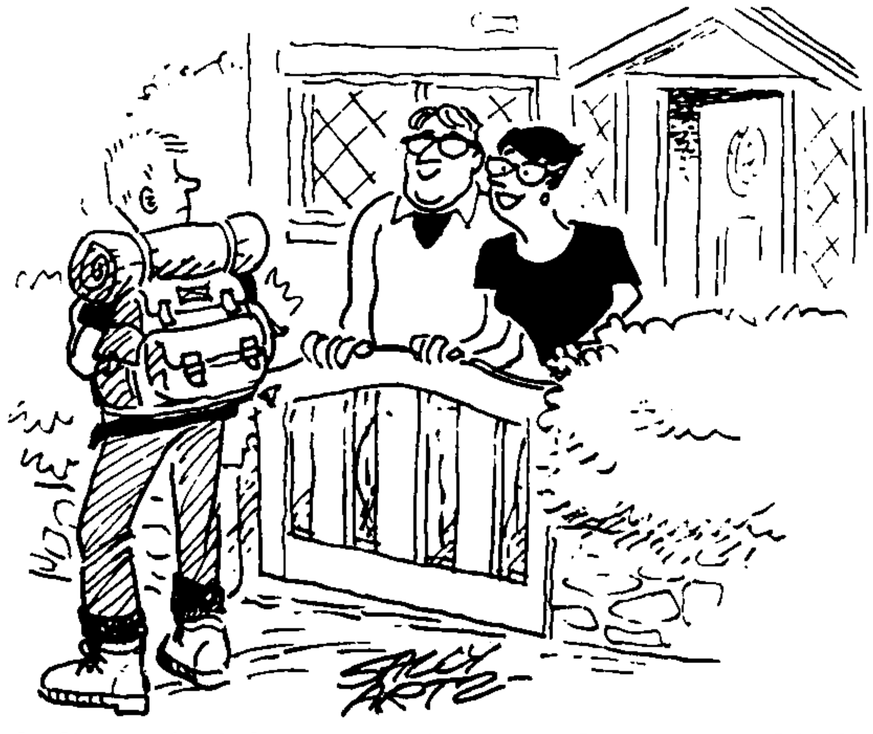
GOING TO POT

He concluded, "Other countries have introduced Liberal Democracy with fatal results. They sit around in a dazed state talking nonsense about changing the world and living in peace and harmony."

Charles Kannabis is 24.

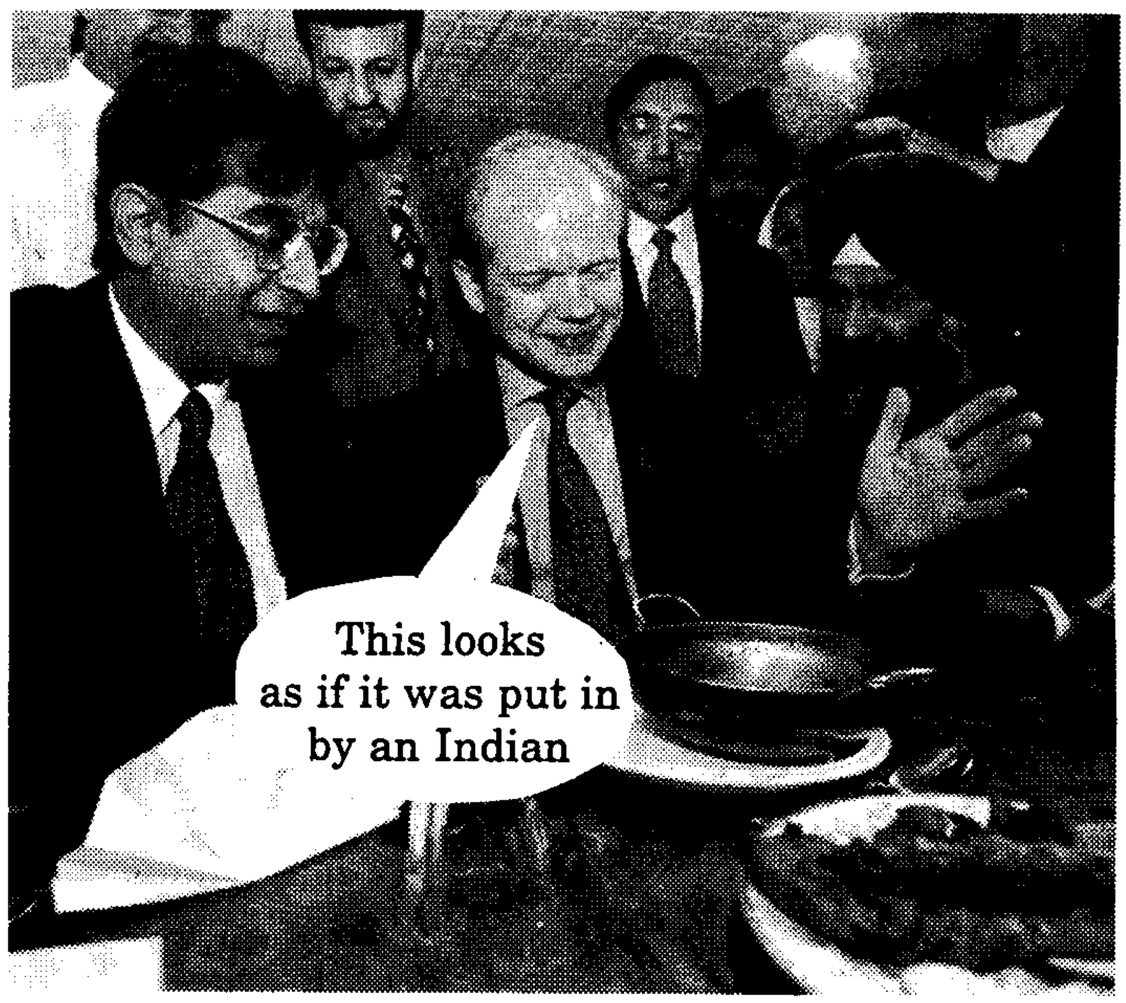
OMAGH REMEMBERED





"Bye, darling – don't forget to write – or 'phone us on: 01273 516819, or fax us on: 01273 510044, or e-mail on: easycum@fairways.co.uk or visit our website on: www.fairways.co.uk..."

HAGUE SHOWS PRINCE PHILIP THE WAY



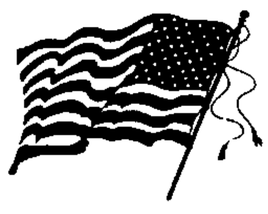
ECLIPSE BLACKS OUT NEWS SHOCK

by Our Eclipse Staff **Phil Space**

THE whole country was kept in complete darkness for several days about what was happening in the world when a solar eclipse completely covered every newspaper in the country.

People put on special spectacles to try and find a story about Northern Ireland, Kosovo or the Prince of Wales going swimming – but to no avail.

"I think I have gone blind," said one reader. "I keep looking at the pages and all I can see is a huge blobby circle with the words 'Total Eclipse' written underneath it."



That Iowa Straw Poll In Full

1. **President George Bush Jr** 307
2. **Mrs Senator Dole** 203
3. **Steve Forbes** $178m
4. **Vice-President Dan Fayle** 3
5. **Jim Zilch** 0
6. **Bob Zippo** 0

Winner: *Money and Nepotism*

Late News

WALES HARPOONED OFF GREECE Greenpeace Protest

THE ONLY known Wales to have swum in Greek waters was attacked yesterday, writes our Greek correspondent *Taki Takalotofcokupthenos.*

A group of hunters equipped with harpoons spotted the Wales disporting himself with his mate in the shallow water off the island of Corfuwataschorchos.

The Wales was spouting about organic vegetables when the hunters cried out "There she blows", believed to be a rude reference to his mate.

However, the Wales, known as Mopy Dick due to his bad temper, swam to safety, leaving the harpoonists empty-handed.

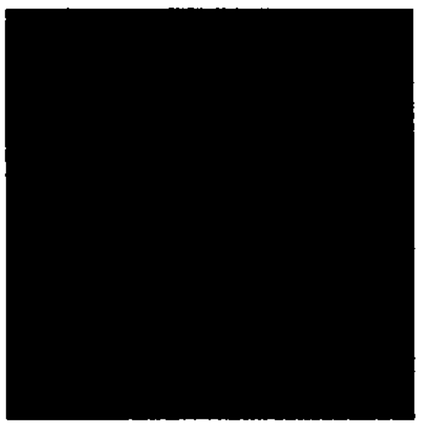
(Reuters)

On other pages

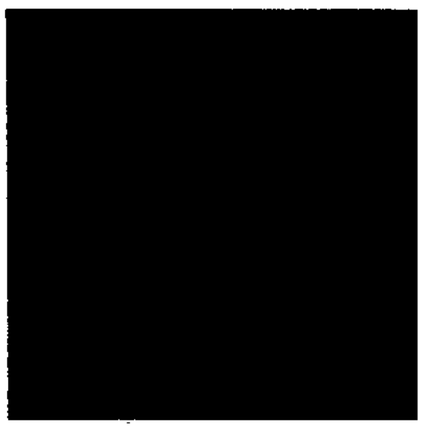
Unfunny Harpoon by Mac

PRIVTE TUITION
Qualified teacher/ literacy specialist RSA certificate in specific learning difficulties (Dyslexia).
Hitchin Advertiser

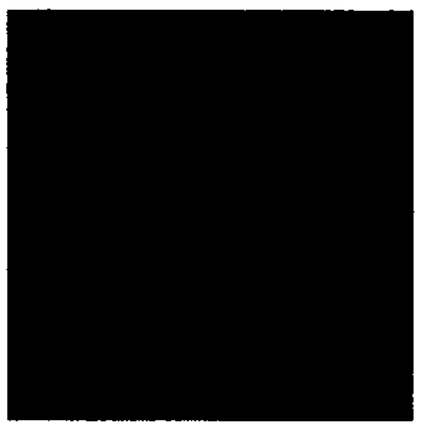
HOW THE WORLD SAW THE GREATEST EVENT OF THE MILLENNIUM



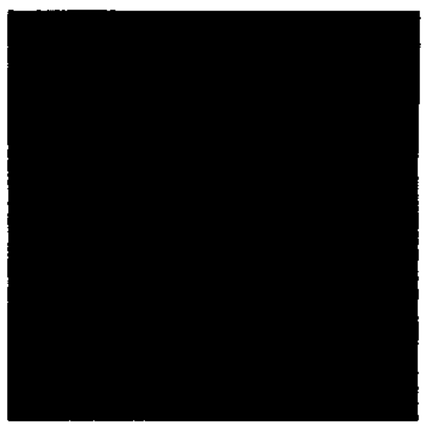
11.37am How it looked in Frankfurt, as bankers left their VDU screens to witness the once-in-a-lifetime spectacle.



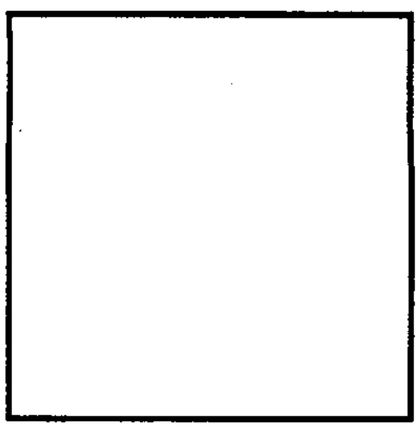
11.57am Romanians packed the streets of Bucharest as the sky went black.



12.26pm What millions of Iranians were allowed out of prison to see in Tehran.



2.12pm Fishermen in the Bay of Bengal gasped in amazement as the world went dark.



6.24am Detroit: millions of Americans were disappointed when the sun failed to disappear.

APOLOGY
The Eclipse

IN RECENT months, in common with all other papers, we may have given the impression that the recent solar eclipse was going to be a uniquely dramatic spectacle, providing an experience that none of us would ever forget. Headlines such as "The Greatest Show On Earth", "Stand By For The Greatest Natural Event Of All Time" and "Whatever You Do, Don't Look At It Or Your Eyes Will Be Permanently Damaged" could well have led readers to suppose that they should drop everything (except of course their special safety glasses) to see the world plunged into an apocalyptic darkness which would lead cows to run amok in fields, dogs to bark uncontrollably, and thousands of motorists to collide with each other in multiple pile-ups.

We now accept that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth in these prognostications, and we are happy to make it clear that the so-called eclipse was a "non-event" largely got up by the press to sell newspapers. So, far from seeing any of the above phenomena, members of the public might have concluded that they were in the presence of nothing more spectacular than a wet Sunday afternoon in Wolverhampton in November.

Post-Eclipse Depression Syndrome (PEDS)

Medical Briefing

IN THE wake of last week's eclipse many people will have experienced PEDS, as we doctors call it. What happens is that, after becoming unnaturally excited for several days in expectation of seeing something out of the ordinary, the patient becomes confused and bewildered when nothing of the kind occurs. At first he experiences the Anger Phase, when he lashes out at the Daily Telegraph for having promised that he would see amazing flashing lights and penumbras at the moment of the sun's disappearance, none of which materialised. He then enters the Depression Phase, where he compulsively repeats "If you ask me, it was a non-event" to anyone who will listen. He then goes into the Frustration Phase when he reads the newspapers the following day, only to discover that he has clearly missed out on an amazing experience which he can never hope to enjoy again unless he lives to the age of 129.

GRAND SUMMER POLITICAL QUIZ RESULT

* © *The Late Sir James Goldsmith*

Winner: **James Strachan.**

Runner-Up: "I'm afraid your office has been bombed by NATO." Submitted by **Marcus Body.**

"It's not a pony tail, it's the skin they pulled back for his face lift"

Edinburgh Festival

The Eye recommends

Best-selling Korean Poet Nun-Tu Hot
(see Poetry)

★ Late Night Cabaret

King Lear Or What?
Actor/comedian Mark Fart travels through the galaxies as King Lear, climaxing as a tomato in his own fridge.

Lord Macdonald Rooms, Fergus Street 11.30

★ Music

Ganga-Roo
Fifty musicians bring together the exotic gongs of Tibet and the bagpipes and steel drums of the Caribbean.

Charles Kennedy Plaza. Lunchtime Saturday August 21

★ Play

Albert Einstein and Terry
Sandy McKilt's "dream sequence" explores the famous scientist's hitherto suppressed homosexual encounter with a young bank clerk in Zurich in 1921. Stars Milo Rotblatt as the inventor of the atom bomb and Jonathan Yentob (Brookside's Eric) as the waiter.

Sir Alec Ferguson Theatre (two weeks)

★ Film

Cornets Of The Heather
Recreates famous true-life wartime murder mystery when peripatetic ice-cream vendor Lavish McTavish (played by Simon Courtauld) was found dead next to his burnt-out van on a remote Hebridean island, which was a top-secret test site for toxic ice-cream which was to be used as Churchill's secret weapon against any German invasion of Britain *(208 minutes).*

Kenny Dalglish Cinema, Evenings 9pm

★ Art

Visions Of Leviathan
Jenny Brown, curator of the Clydebank Shipbuilding Theme Museum, has assembled a unique photographic record of the men and women who built the cranes which played a key role in the construction of some of the world's greatest ocean-going liners.

Lord David Steele Gallery, Donny Dewar St.

★ Jazz

An evening with Mögri Mögrinsön, this year's winner of the Médaille d'Or (Luxembourg) for Young Jazz Musician of the Year. With Jurg Jurgenson (piano), Durg Durgenson (drums). Tunes range from Monk to Mögrinsön.

Sean Connery Club, Bond St. Nightly 3am.

★ Poetry

Anthems For A New Millennium
International workshop featuring a galaxy of six internationally known poets, including Zimbabwe's Nkomo Anono, Iran's Rubayat Wax, North Korea's Daewoo Kim Il Sing, Hungary's Tibor Szlobb *(That's enough internationally-known poets. Ed.)*

Lord Lairg Assembly Rooms, Ewing Street

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Victor Mature & Jennifer Paterson.

So. Farewell
Then Victor
Mature.

Star of
Samson
And Delilah.

Also Jennifer
Paterson

Of *Two Fat*
Ladies fame.

Judging by the
Size of the
Obituaries, Jennifer

Was the bigger
Star.

In more ways
Than one.

E.J. Thribb (17fi)

World of Soccer

IT MUST BE NEASDEN FOR 2006

Knee's Bid For Place In History

by **E.I. Erewego**, Our Man In The Havana Coffee Experience, with the Orange-Flavoured Decaff Capuccino and the Organic Seaweed Muffin

THE soccer world was rocked to its foundations yesterday when Neasden soccer supremo, Ron Knee, 59, unveiled his plans to bring World Cup football to Neasden Bridge.

Said the ashen-faced soccer legend, "Neasden has everything to play host to the world's finest.

"We have all the facilities associated with the North Circular Road," he told newsmen.

"A top-grade stadium, complete with grass, goalposts and white lines as good as any you'll get anywhere in the world.

"We can also offer three world-class footballs, two already pumped up. There is not a player in the world who would not be proud to find the back of the net with one of our balls."

MORE BALLS

Asked about other amenities for the millions of tourists who can be expected to flock into Neasden, should the bid be successful, Knee held up a copy of the Neasden Echo.

"Neasden is due to be designated a World Heritage Site by the EU," he explained.

"We are already in discussions with Lord Foster of Lager, who is going to create a 10,000-room hotel complex able to compete with anything in the world."

NO CHANCE

But not everyone is pleased with Knee's vision of Neasden 2006.

Thousands of fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) last night presented a petition against the planned demolition of the famous "Twin Toilets" which for decades have been a symbol of all that is Neasden.

"I did not fight in the last war," Sid said. "I was far too young."

Ron Knee is 59.

Late Score

Internet Cup (1st round, second leg)

F.C. Neasden 0
Kosovo Casuals 15
(Pevsner o.g. 15)

HUSBAND

HAGUE PLANS FOR RE-LAUNCH

by Our Advertising Staff **Hargleby, Bogleby and Pratt**

AN AUTUMN re-launch is being planned to boost the flagging popularity of William Hague, the Conservative leader.

Since the product came to the market two years ago with a good deal of hype, consumer groups across the board have shown a marked resistance to Hague.

"We simply cannot move him as he is now," says marketing director Amanda Platell, of Bollocks and Crapp. "Nothing short of a complete makeover will get the sales graph upwardly mobile."

Waste of Time

The new campaign, planned by Platell and her colleague Ffion Jenkins, will centre on presenting the product as "cuddly, casual and tactile".

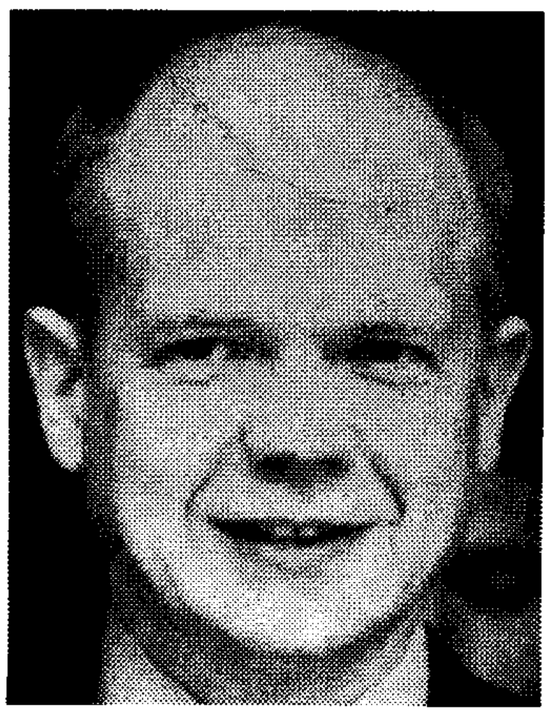
High on the Platell-Jenkins list of priorities are:

- **changing name to "Billy Hug". This emphasises both casual and tactile at the same time;**
- **hair implant, to replace "unfriendly bald image";**
- **Des Lynam-style moustache to make him look more like ITV's popular new star Des Lynam.**

Photo-opportunities for the new-look Hague include:

- **visiting fish-and-chip shop in Yorkshire to emphasise Yorkshire roots;**
- **congratulating lottery winner Aunt Freda Hague and patting her dog, to show closeness to family** *(have we got her address?)*;
- **appearing on ITV as football anchorman.**

HOW HE WILL LOOK



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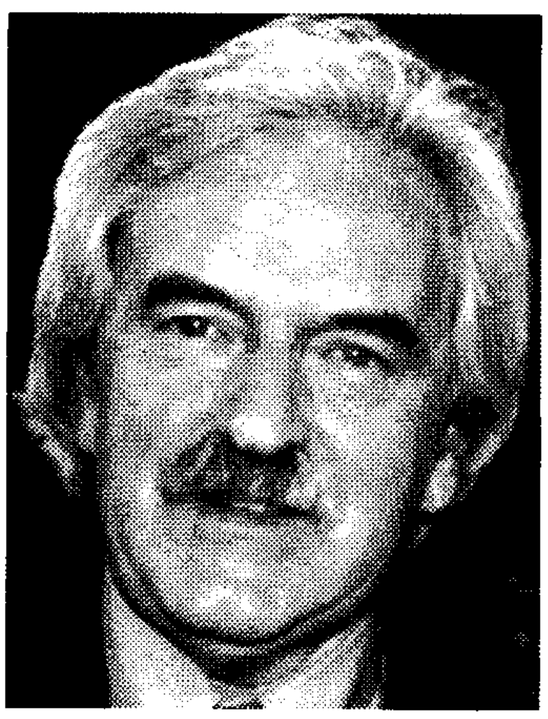

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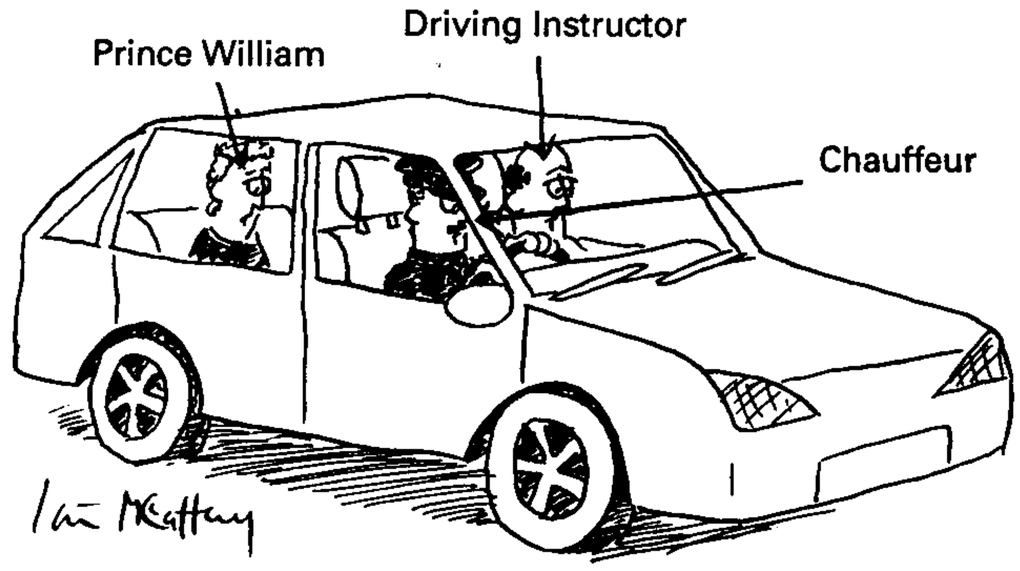


Royal Driving Lessons: A Guide

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters to the Editor

The Duke's Gaffe

SIR – For anyone familiar with India, as I am, it is difficult to comprehend the outcry which has greeted the Duke of Edinburgh's so-called "gaffe" in referring to some electrical wiring as looking as if it had been "put in by an Indian".

Those of us who have spent many years in the subcontinent will be only too familiar with the lax practices of the native electricians, or fusebox wallahs, as they were affectionately known.

I well remember an incident in Madras in 1927 when the lamp on our bridge table began to flicker during a particularly tense rubber involving my wife Mrs Gussett, as she then was, the late Akond of Swat, an old family friend, and his delightful wife, the Anakonda.

I had just bid two no trumps, when suddenly the aforementioned light went out completely as its bulb exploded, showering the four of us with tiny shards of glass.

We at once summoned our local fusebox wallah, a Mr Chauduri, who dutifully disappeared into the cupboard under the stairs with his "bag of tricks". After several hours of tinkering with the complicated wiring, while we continued our game with the aid of a hurricane lamp, somewhat incommoded by the huge pink moths which flew around our table in droves, attracted by the unaccustomed brilliance of the kerosene-powered device, Mr Chauduri emerged with a cry of triumph.

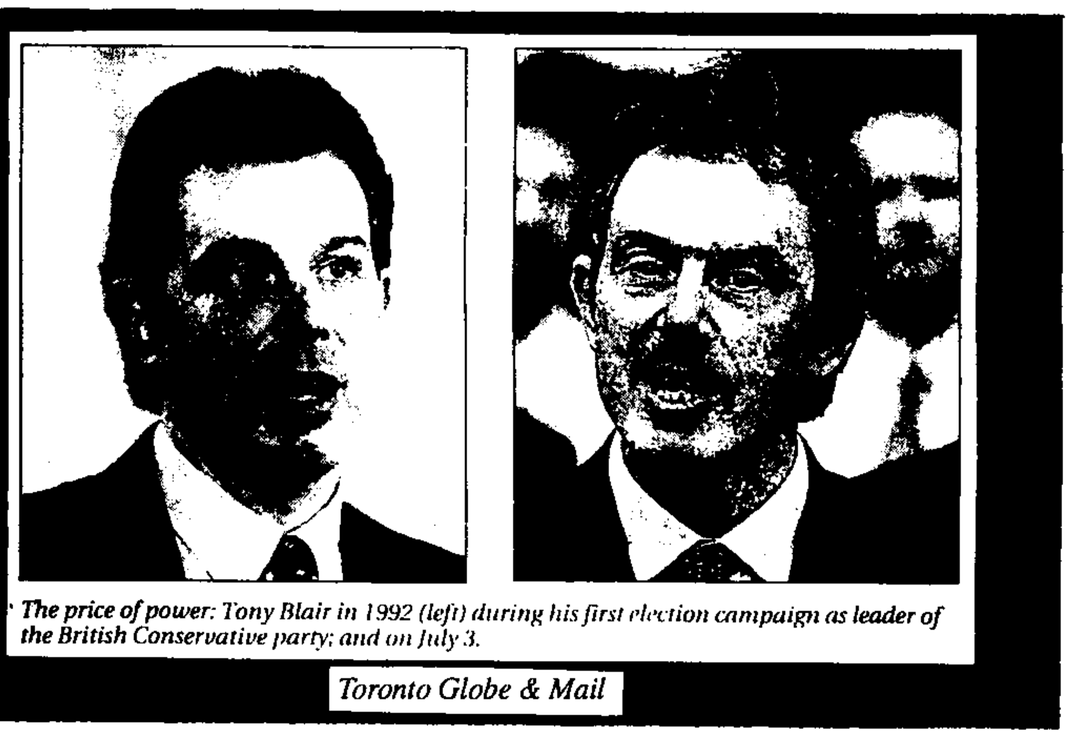
"Everything now Number One and A-OK, Gussett Sahib," he confidently reported, with a toothless grin.

I went to the door to switch on the lights, but no sooner had I done so than most of India was plunged into darkness, much to the amusement of our friendly fusebox wallah.

"Oh dear, Sahib!" he cried. "I fear I have connected you to the national grid. Oh my goodness gracious! This will never do!"

Such an incident, by no means untypical, will no doubt have been familiar to the Duke, whose mother-in-law, it must be remembered, was Empress of India and whose uncle "Dickie" Mountbatten was no stranger to the vice-regal lodge at Simla.

H. GUSSETT,
The Old LEB Showrooms,
Wattage,
Oxon.



The price of power: Tony Blair in 1992 (left) during his first election campaign as leader of the British Conservative party; and on July 3.

Toronto Globe & Mail

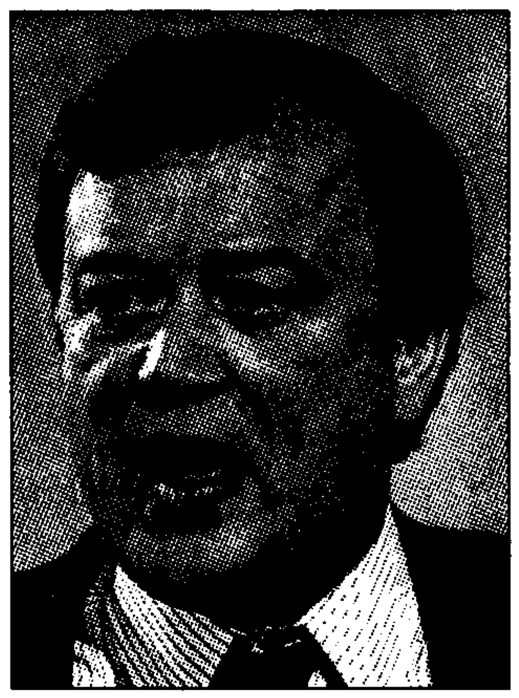
WORLD EXCLUSIVE

THE MAJOR MEMOIRS

In what is being hailed by its publishers Harper-Collins as "the greatest political document of the millennium," former Prime Minister John Major looks back on his tumultuous seven years at the pinnacle of power.

NOW READ ON:

MR HANLEY — "useless"



MR CLARKE — "let me down"

MR HURD — "toffee-nosed snob"

WHEN SIR Robin Butler rang me up to say that I had become prime minister, I had little idea of how difficult the job was to turn out to be. Oh no.

This was in no small measure due to a certain woman, who made my life a hell on earth from day one. And I am not referring to my wife Norman! She was always supportive except on the frequent occasions when she was otherwise engaged in promoting her new career as an author and celebrity in her own right!

The woman to whom I refer was of course my predecessor Mrs Thatcher, who was to remain a not inconsiderable thorn in my flesh throughout the seven years of my premiership.

I do not in any way wish to rake up old wounds. In my judgement it is always better to draw a line in the sand under such matters.

Nevertheless, it is only fair to say that, without her constant interference, I would still be in Number 10 today.

ANOTHER person who let me down very badly indeed was John Redwood when I resigned as prime minister to allow anyone who wished to challenge my way of doing things to stand up and be counted.

It was unforgiveable of Mr Redwood to dare to stand against me.

Once again, I have no desire to dig up old sores, or to call him names. But in my book Mr Redwood is a BASTARD and as such I bought a special exercise book from Ryman's to put his name in. I called it my Bastard Book and I have it before me as I write these very words. Oh yes.

Here are some other names in the book:

Mr Lamont
Mr Waldegrave
Mrs Bottomley
Mr Howard
Mr Rifkind

not to mention everybody else in my Cabinet.

I think it is fair to say that, without their constant disloyalty, I would still be enjoying the fruits of office to this day.

ANOTHER big problem was all the Conservative MPs, who spent their entire time trying to make me look silly. For instance, when I had my very good idea for setting up a Cones Hotline, all they did was laugh.

This gave the impression that our Party was divided, and that I did not have the powers of leadership to hold it together.

This was quite untrue, and I think it is fair to say that if the MPs had shown more loyalty, I might still be occupying the position which is unfortunately held by Mr Blair.

The MPs were not the only people to let me down. Right from the start, the newspapers tried to portray me as just a boring little man in glasses and a grey suit. As anyone who has read these memoirs will by now have realised, this is a travesty of the true John Major, who in my judgement would still be prime minister today if it was not for those bastards in the media.

Tomorrow: How my brother Terry helped to make me look an idiot with his silly book of memoirs, which I never read because it was totally inaccurate, eg. on p. 361, where he states that the second bike I got for Christmas was a Hercules Kestrel, when as the photograph on p. 52 clearly showed, it was a Raleigh Roadmaster. I hope future historians will not regard Terry's book as in any way a reliable source. I hope they will also recognise that if it had not been for Terry's cheap publicity-seeking antics, I would almost certainly have won the 1997 election by a landslide, and Mr Hague would have remained a complete nobody, which is what he is, although as a former leader of the Conservative Party, I naturally wish him well.

SCHOOL'S OUT
I NEED A REST. YOU TAKE THEM TODAY!
BUT I'VE GOT A MEETING TODAY! I CAN'T GO TO LEGOLAND! AGAIN!
GOOD GOD! THIS IS A CHILDREN'S FILM!?
WICKED!
FUCK YOU!
ASS-HOLE
DO YOU SELL CAGES?
THE WALKMAN!
BUT I GAVE YOU SEVENTY POUNDS YESTERDAY!
I HATE THE SCIENCE MUSEUM! UNDERSTAND? HATE!
ADAM'S PARENTS HAVE TAKEN A VILLA IN THE CARIBBEAN! THAT'S COOL!
YOU WILL BE TAKEN FROM HERE AND FORCED TO TAKE YOUR SON TO PLANET HOLLYWOOD!
NO! ANYTHING BUT THAT!
STAYING OVER
YOU GOT ANY GAY CHANNELS
MTV
WHINE
WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO TOMORROW!?
THUD THUD!

DIARY

FREDERICK RAPHAEL ON STANLEY KUBRICK

The telephone rang. It had, I noted, a Kubrickian ring about it — all-powerful yet deferential, assured yet almost unassured. My instincts are rarely, if ever, faulty, wrong or fallacious. Sure enough it was Stanley Kubrick. He was a director I had been admired by for many years.

S.K. Is that the great Frederic Raphael?

F.R. *C'est moi.*

S.K. Gee whizz. Whaddayaknow! You speak French too! The guy's a genius!

It was indeed Stanley Kubrick. Though he had lived in England for many years, one could still detect in his speech the reliance on American colloquialism common to the intellectually insecure.

S.K. Zipadee-doo-dah! Well, hellzapoppin and Lordy-lordy! Have a nice day! Wanna write a movie for me, Freddie?

At this point, I was reminded of a similar experience when I won, or, as they used to say, was "elected" to a major scholarship in Classics at St John's College, Cambridge. I seem to remember using the telephone around that time, and this brought it all back: the constant plaudits for being the most intelligent student of my generation, the First Class Honours degree, the outstanding early achievements in the fields of screenwriting and fiction, the extraordinary career that found me ending up, quite against my expectations, widely regarded, not least by myself, as one of the greatest post-war writers of the 20th century. Extraordinary how evocative a simple telephone conversation can be.

I had known and admired Kubrick's work for many years. His "Paths of Glory" had particularly struck me: just two days before I saw it I had received this call from the great director Stanley Donen:

S.D. Freddie? Hi! Freddie, you're a genius! Whatever you write is pure gold-dust! Small wonder you're the most highly-regarded screenwriter in the whole US of A with over twenty superb screenplays to your credit! Ciao, Freddie!

And now I was to write for Kubrick himself. Pleased? He was thrilled. An entry in my journal records my first visit to Kubrick's home:

Journal entry 6.12.93. I am greeted at the door by Stanley. He is scruffy, and sports a beard, while I am smart, though never ostentatiously so, and clean-shaven. I permit myself a measure of intellectual levity in my replies to his somewhat coarse and brutish questions:

S.K. D'you wanna sandwich, Freddie?

F.R. A sandwich! Was it not Aristotle who said of the sandwich that it is little more than two slices of bread containing something other-than bread? Or was it our very own F. Raphael? One so easily forgets!

S.K. Brown or white?

F.R. A question that, as Wedekind observed, most surely requires an answer. Have you read much Wedekind, Stanley? No? I thought not!

S.K. Brown or white?

As the above dialogue suggests, I have little fear that Kubrick is intellectually beyond my reach; I am not even sure how bright he is. He prefers to talk of sandwiches ("Brown or white?" he kept saying, as though it really mattered) than of literature and ideas. It is almost as though he is frightened by the very reach of my perception. Perhaps, deep down, he suspects I would be a greater director than he if only I could have been bothered. How I would love to reassure him, but my woeful integrity prevents me from uttering a dishonest word, dammit.

To employ a classical allusion, S.K. sometimes reminds me of a little animal or rodent — a grasshopper, maybe, or a goldfish — who feels himself overshadowed by a lion. It is the story of Herakles and the Minotaur all over again — with F.R. playing both roles, to S.K.'s piece of string. He greatly admires me, to be sure. But dost not the man who is full of admiration also feel daunted by the object of that admiration?

S.K. Freddie! Did I tell you you are a genius! Say, Freddie, how doya write realistic... dialogue that convinces... the reader that this is exactly what it was like to be ... actually there? Think you can do it?

F. R. Sure, Stanley. You just need to... place dots here and there. And start some sentences with "and". And

S.K. have people interrupt each other and –

F.R. finish each other's sentences. Finally, if your main character's American, make sure you insert some obvious Americanisms, like –

S.K. Gee whizz, Freddie, too damn right! Hotdiggety-dawg! You betcha!

Mutatatis mutandi ergo sum. Stanley sought neither loyalty nor intimacy; both made betrayal more likely. In this, he is not unlike Marty Scorsese, Willie Wyler, Dirky Bogarde and Fayey Dunaway, all of whom have known and admired me from behind closed doors. But was there something deep inside in Stanley that held back from fuller intimacy? Something he once said suggested a certain reserve, a certain holding-off. I was making idle chit-chat when he came up with his telling remark.

F.R. *(sipping tea)* Stanley, are you, like *moi*, able to translate Aristotle into Spanish and back again via German? Oh, sorry – I was forgetting you never achieved a First at Cambridge!!!

S.K. Here's your money. Now piss off.

What did he mean? I guess I will never know. I never saw him again, but I rather suspect that, even in the grave, his admiration for me never wavers. *Amo, amas, amat, amsomarvellous, amanartist, amacunt...*

Celeb

LIGGER

DRUGS, ALCOHOL, SEX, GAMBLING. I'M ADDICTED TO ALL OF THEM YOU KNOW...
I SEE...
I'M FOREVER GETTING INTO TERRIBLE TROUBLE BECAUSE OF IT. I SEEM TO NEED THE THRILL OF DANGER...
REALLY?
LIKE A LOT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE, I HAVE A COMPULSIVE DISORDER WHICH MAKES ME SEEK OUT HIGH RISK SITUATIONS...
LIKE TELLING IT ALL TO A GOSSIP COLUMNIST LIKE ME RATHER THAN TO YOUR SHRINK...?
YEAH, PRINT EVERYTHING I'VE TOLD YOU. IT'LL GIVE ME A BUZZ...

Literary Review

Men Writing Sadly

Mr Commitment
Mike Gayle
(Flame, £10)

THE origins of the modern bloke novel — highbrow prototypes such as Martin Amis's *Success* (1978) excepted — go back to Simon Nye's *Men Behaving Badly*, which first saw the light as a not terribly exciting and not terribly successful Penguin back in 1988. (Nye wrote one more novel, the completely forgotten *Wideboy*, then stuck to TV.)

Late 80s bloke was simply beery, sex-crazed and useless. Subsequently, softened, sensitised and Hornbyfied, he was still useless but endearingly so. He might still want to shag your arse off, but there'd be a bunch of roses — well, daffodils — in the morning. Or something like that.

Post-Hornby and more recent genre-definers such as Tony Parsons' *Man and Boy*, which — whisper it among yourselves, lads — was actually quite good, publishers' lists are simply groaning under the weight of modern bloke books.

Mr Gayle, author of this week's darling tome, has already jumped in with the highly successful *My Legendary Girlfriend*. Shortly to join it in the dumpbins are Alex George's *Working It Out*, which features among other things a downwardly mobile solicitor named Johnathan and a hamster named Morty; Mark Barrowcliffe's *The Golden Girl* (a slightly more Hardyesque number in which two flatsharers track down the doe-eyed sizzler over whom their best mate killed himself); and Damian Lanigan's *Stretch, 29* (a chap called Stretch, who's 29 don't you know?).

Who reads this stuff about deadheads in their late 20s and early 30s coming to terms with relationships, settling down, embracing monogamy and hearing the patter of tiny feet? Inevitably there's some faint anthropological interest in these despatches from the front line of male singleton culture. Or perhaps the whole thing is merely an elaborate plot dreamed up by mesdames Germaine Greer and Natasha Walter, writing under pseudonyms with the aim of showing us how dim the average man really is.

Publishers assume that it's men wanting to read about themselves, which I don't believe for a moment. No self-respecting bloke — even the yoghurt-eating, Pringle-wearing ones — would be seen dead reading this kind of tosh. No indeed, these are girls' books actually, soft focus users' manuals for those compelled to treat with the opposite sex, propounding the notion that ooh, men are sometimes really awful, but we love them awfully really.

Mr Commitment absolutely bristles with the kind of messages that readers of the late 90s style sections presumably want to hear. Blokes are all right, y'know. Go on at us enough and we'll eventually marry you. We're even prepared to have kids. You love us really, even though we fart in bed and never change our underpants.

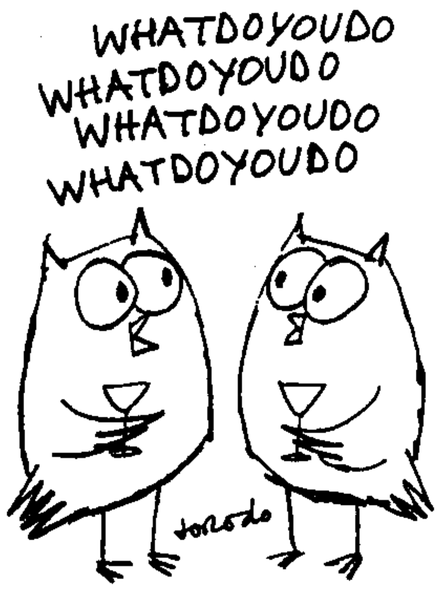
Duffy, Gayle's stand-up comedian hero, is also Mr Archetype: late twenties, entwined for the last four years around the sinuous form of ad-sales honchette Mel, completely hopeless at all aspects of mature adult life but kind of sweetly affectionate, you know, and panicked senseless by the thought of moving in, settling down, staying put and the ritual excursions to IKEA.

What follows, for all the mock-highbrow epigraphs ("I am committed to non-commitment" — Federico Fellini, that kind of thing), is the purest corn: 300 pages of goofily elongated converse and bright-eyed larks that would have irked at a quarter of the length, and as sentimental as a Victorian novelette. It's not that you know the hero is going to get the girl, or rather get got by the girl, nor even that the thought processes and articulations enjoined by this procedure would disgrace a children's TV programme, simply that the obstacles placed in their way are as flimsy as matchwood.

Only once does anything resembling genuine tension and unease raise its head: at the wedding of Duffy's slobby flatmate's ex-girlfriend, when boorish Dan gets frozen out by brother, groom, ushers and parents and finally jumps out of the car en route to the reception. The rest is an exceptionally stodgy exercise in pre-programming, in which He bottles out (on the IKEA run, natch), She meets another, He does too, with a fortuitous pregnancy and some very serious conversations sewing up everything just wonderfully.

To draw an analogy with sport — not at all an inappropriate line of attack — the modern bloke's novel is as tedious as soccer. Just as surely as Manchester United are going to win everything, so you just know Miss Forthright will bop Mr Procrastinator on the head with her mobile and drag him off to their Habitat-furnished cave. What we have here, in fact, is a genre horribly in thrall to a piece of socially acceptable moral propaganda, and in this particular case a morality tale lacking any kind of edge which turns, towards the end, into a simple exercise in wish-fulfilment.

Mr Commitment would have worked much better as a book if Dan had walked away, or — much more plausible – if Mel had written him off as a waste of space. But oh dear me, people do like a happy ending don't you know? Actually, I find this kind of moral conservatism highly commendable. But by God it makes for boring books.



Owl Drinks Party

Books and Bookmen

■ IT IS common enough for authors who share a publisher or agent to puff each other's books, but few examples are as absurd as the mutual high regard expressed by some of hack-turned-bookman John Blake's star writers.

The Guv'nor, the ghosted autobiography of bare knuckle boxer Lenny McLean and an unlikely best seller for Blake Publishing, began the whole thing by carrying on the cover McLean's own estimation of his image: "I look what I am, a hard bastard!"

However, on the jacket of the follow-up, the memoirs of "Britain's most vicious man", Roy "Pretty-boy" Shaw, McLean — who had died shortly after the publication of his own book — was happy to defer to his stablemate from beyond the grave, opining that Shaw was "the hardest bastard I ever met!"

Now, Blake is readying the life story of McLean and Shaw's old mucker, stuntman Nosher Powell, for publication, and the front cover carries Shaw's earnest summation of Powell's abilities. "When Nosher hits you, you stay bloody hit!" Very touching, but could these gestures of friendship in fact be unsubtle messages to anyone thinking of writing an unfavourable review?

■ ACCORDING to dogma-crazed HMV Media chief executive Alan "Weasel" Giles (see *Eyes passim*), "there is no plausible explanation" for the woeful decline in sales growth at the group's Waterstone's stores.

Reporting on the results, the *Times* noted that "Weasel" was "at a loss to explain why consumer spending was so slow, given the general healthy economy".

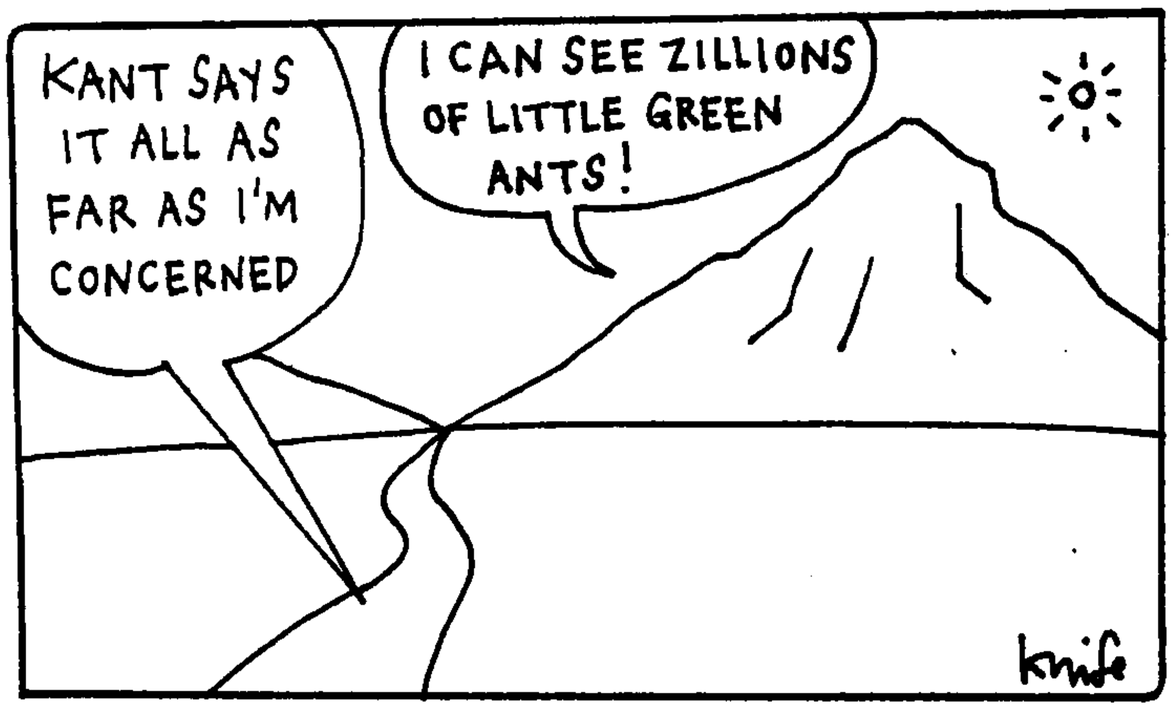
Perhaps he and his newly-arrived lieutenant David Kneale should look a bit more closely at their own policy decisions if they want to know why the stores are in trouble. In Brighton, for example, "Weasel" responded to the arrival of US bookselling giant Borders by relaunching the town's successful Dillons store as a Waterstone's. Unfortunately, Giles had acted far too late and, by the time the American-style superstore opened, the brave new Waterstone's was still a building site. Not surprisingly, Borders seized on its competitor's confusion and took a lot of its trade.

There was talk of the resort's other, less prominent Waterstone's becoming part of a repositioned Dillons chain, tackling the WH Smug-dominated mass market head on. With the absurd demise of the Dillons name, this is no longer an option, but the shop is in the process of relinquishing several major lines — including academic titles — to the new store anyway, which is never a good sign. With this record of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, is it any wonder the HMV Media flotation planned for later this year has been called off on the instructions of major shareholder EMI?

■ SEVERAL years after he was ignominiously pushed from his exalted position at Guinness Publishing, ostensibly for being too old, but more likely because of his increasingly embarrassing public sorties on behalf of the anti-Europe, anti-everything Freedom Association, Norris McWhirter has surfaced at Virgin Publishing hoping to catch the Christmas market with his *Book of Millennium Records*.

However, a mischievous force in the publisher's art department seems to have been at work on the book's cover. In the top right-hand corner, directly above the author's name, is a sepia portrait of Adolf Hitler in full salute mode. As it is hard to see what records the Fuhrer ever broke beyond the field of mass genocide – not a natural topic for a stocking filler — Bookworm wonders what inspired his inclusion.

'Bookworm'



River Deep, Mountain High

IN THE BACK

PRISONS

Not so magic Wandsworth

THE Prison Service is bracing itself for another withering report from the chief inspector of prisons, Sir David "Rambo" Ramsbotham — this time into Wandsworth prison, where it seems bullying and intimidation by staff are as institutionalised as they were at the Scrubs.

Rambo marched into the south London jail unannounced four weeks ago with a larger than usual inspectorate team after lawyers and prison reform groups had passed him details of allegations of violence. Five are understood to be the subject of legal action.

One former inmate described an incident last summer in which an inmate's arm was broken after being forced behind his back by staff. In another, just after Christmas, a prisoner was screaming for help after officers piled into his cell.

Many of the allegations about Wandsworth — which has long enjoyed the dubious reputation of being one of the country's toughest jails and was once the centre of overt National Front activity — centre around the jail's punishment unit. But the *Eye* has been told that Rambo has been assured that blood found by his team on a cell wall was the result of a fight by two inmates and did not involve any staff.

As with last week's report into Exeter prison and the complete condemnation of Wormwood Scrubs, Rambo will place much of the blame for the state of the prison on managers and governors, who have allowed it to be run by the Prison Officers Association. One insider said: "The place is run by cliques of lower ranking officers. The governors know what is going on, but they just turn a blind eye."

In an unprecedented move Rambo's team did, however, call in the prisons ombudsman to examine the complaints procedure at Wandsworth which appears to be totally ineffective in exposing or dealing with allegations of mistreatment.

Needle work

MINISTERS have rightly recognised that a good place to target their anti-drugs strategy is in the country's jails where up to half of all inmates are drug abusers.

They have given the prison service a huge sum — £76m — to provide specialist drugs counselling and treatment in all jails, with up to 50 intensive drug programmes around the country.

With the government's own research suggesting that drug abusers commit about £4bn worth of property crimes a year to feed their habits, and with new research highlighting the success of specialist drug agencies, it looks like money well invested. But documents leaked to the *Eye* suggest that bureaucrats at Prison Service headquarters are thwarting the effort. Senior civil servants do not seem to like the fact that many of these successful drug workers are themselves ex-addicts who have past convictions for drugs or related offences.

Even though they admit that such drug workers have "a credibility among drug users which enables them to build a rapport with a group who are difficult to influence", under plans being drawn up by the Prison Service they will be excluded from the jails.

New criteria being introduced across the system will mean no drugs worker will be allowed into prisons if they have:

- a conviction for supplying drugs;
- a conviction for a sex offence;
- a conviction for any offence (except motoring) within the last five years;
- been released from prison within the last five years.

To work in a top security prison a worker will also be excluded if they have used drugs within the last two years. One leading drugs agency said: "Under those rules that would exclude two of my best managers and many of my staff."

Curiously the Prison Service plans to subject civilian drugs workers to random drug testing, even though it recognises it could be accused of discrimination because it has no plans to test its own uniformed staff.

Learning difficulties

QUESTIONS are being asked about how Birmingham's Matthew Boulton College — recently named and shamed by one government ministry as one of the worst in the country — managed to win a £12m Prison Service contract with another. In September last year it was appointed to run education programmes in 10 jails in the Midlands on, according to a prisons spokesman, a "value for money basis".

But two months later inspectors from the Further Education Funding Council went in and found huge debts, low pass rates, weak governance and a huge catalogue of failings including, according to the *Times Educational Supplement*, "poor value for money".

The prisons spokesman denied any conflict of interest between the contract award and the fact that one of its education staff at the time, Peter Sharp, left the service and joined Matthew Boulton four months later. "He played no part in the review that considered the bids and his transfer was cleared by the cabinet office," said the spokesman.

The cabinet office also cleared the appointment of a retired education official Peter Dale-Gough to NESCOT, which won the contract to run education services in jails around London. Immediately after his new appointment some governors, said to be concerned about a possible conflict, had denied him access to their jails. "But that is standard practice until the transfer has cabinet approval," said the spokesman.

ASBESTOSIS

Cape crusaders

NO DOUBT Cape plc and its spin doctors are congratulating themselves on an about-turn by the British courts which has blocked the rights of nearly 2,000 sick and dying black South African asbestos workers to sue in this country.

For around 50 years Cape, the English multinational, took full advantage of the apartheid regime and owned and ran huge asbestos mines and mills in Northern Cape and Northern Province. A health inspector once reported seeing black children as young as 12 being used to trample down the poisonous stuff, urged on by burly men with whips. Mothers, with little or no protection, used to take their children to work with them.

Cape appears to have ignored persistent warnings about the dangers. Now many of those workers and others living near the mills which spewed out asbestos dust over the neighbourhood are paying the price with lung cancers and asbestosis.

Like their British counterparts working in the company's UK factories — who, records suggest, enjoyed better safety standards — the South Africans want compensation from Cape for the fatal risks to which they were exposed. While Cape has settled hundreds of claims from its British workers, it seems determined not to do the same for the South Africans.

In a case which went to the House of Lords, five workers were given the go ahead to sue Cape in this country for the cancers and illnesses they now suffer. Earlier this year the numbers of workers or the families of those who had died wishing to sue rose to 2,000. Cape, clearly fearing damaging publicity and the threat of having to pay out up to £80m in compensation, called in two former Tory spin doctors who decided the best way of stopping the action was to play the race card.

The aim, according to a memo from Charles Lewington, John Major's former media adviser, was to persuade a right-wing newspaper to run a story about British taxpayers having to pay the bill for a case brought by a lot of foreigners, while at the same time persuading the lord chancellor to curtail access to legal aid.

Mr Lewington told the company: "The wider political implications of the granting of legal aid to even a handful of non-British claimants will be immediately apparent to a paper like the *Mail*. The political ironies are so delicious for a paper like the *Mail* (a Labour lord chancellor having to chose between black workers and multinationals) that the detail of the claims are likely to be of secondary interest."

Even though the company's wheeze was rumbled by leaks to the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, at the start of Cape's hearing last month to stay the proceedings, the *Daily Mail*'s headline was, as if on Cape's cue, 2,000 South Africans win UK legal aid. The opening sentence: "British taxpayers will foot the legal costs of more than 2,000 South Africans who are suing a British company."

Of course no one can accuse our judges of being influenced by newspapers. Mr Justice Buckley said his decision to stay the proceedings was because he found the huge increase in the number of claimants amounted to a "material change" in the case. Public policy dictated that they should sue in the South African courts, because of the practical difficulties in dealing with so many cases here.

But Cape stopped operating in South Africa in 1979, it has no assets in that country and because of a "no-fault" and derisory compensation scheme operated by mining companies, some former workers have only limited legal rights. Under South African law, the families of those who have already died also have limited rights; and for all, the chances of obtaining legal representation in South Africa on a par with that available to a wealthy multi-national are zilch.

Mr Justice Buckley said he "took comfort" in his ruling from a similar decision in the New York courts which had halted the claims of the Indian Bhopal victims who were suing Union Carbide.

No doubt Cape — with its £238m turnover and £13.1m operating profits — also took comfort, because 15 years after the disaster most Bhopal victims remain uncompensated.

The South African workers are to appeal.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Man with the abbey habit

WHY DID a famous Benedictine boarding school close at the start of July claiming a lack of pupils and money, when the abbey to which it is linked is worth more than £8m, and pledges of support worth £800,000 had been obtained by parents and old boys in the past year?

Douai Abbey, one of Britain's few remaining Roman Catholic public schools, was founded in France in 1615 and included Anne Widdecombe and the Duke of Norfolk among its patrons.

When it hit financial difficulties in April last

year, parents and old boys set up the Douai School Action Group to save it from closure. But this April the school ran out of money again and went into administration.

The abbey's trustees told the Charities Commission in April 1998 that the decision to close Douai school was made after an inspection report in March that year had found that it would cost £1.5m over the next three years to save the school. The trustees argued that even if they did inject the extra £1.5m the school might not break even and concluded: "Having taken professional advice, the community felt this was not prudent, and therefore the trustees decided to close the school."

Could this "professional advice" have come from the abbey's financial adviser John Hubert, a non-executive director of Elan Computing Ltd and former managing director of the *Eye*'s favourite computer company, EDS, who was instrumental in closing down another Catholic boarding school at Belmont Abbey in Herefordshire in 1994?

Hubert resigned from EDS in January 1987 in the wake of bad publicity about the company's employment practices, including cases of US employees who had been encouraged to lie to UK immigration officers to enter Britain without work permits.

He was bursar of Belmont Abbey and director of a company called Benedomus Ltd, set up to develop properties in the abbey grounds. Belmont's answer to Bill Gates, Hubert was also a director of Monksoft, a computer company which not only provided the monks with a new pastime but was used to market the abbey development as the ideal location for B&B and wedding receptions.

Hubert negotiated a deal between the Douai School Action Group and Douai Abbey in May 1998 to form the school into a limited company known as the Douai School Trust which would lease the school buildings and playing fields for 99 years.

The school's administrator Shirley Jackson, of Jackson Norton Insolvency Practitioners, said that when the school continued to fail the abbey was unable to make further donations because the school was now an independent company. She denied that this situation might have been predicted when the separation took place.

The statement to the Charities Commission reveals that in the financial year ending 31 August 1997 the abbey held more than £7m in "unrestricted funds" and nearly £1.6m in stocks and shares.

The deal struck last year saw the abbey give the school an initial £400,000 which it would earn back from the school in rent and fees within six years. The abbey was not unable to save the school, it was unwilling.

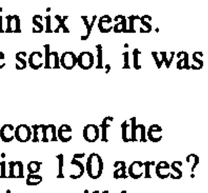
The question now is what will become of the school property and grounds comprising 150 acres? According to Shirley Norton no decision will be taken until the autumn.

The 1997 financial statement said: "The redundant School buildings will be available to be developed for charity purposes or to be let or sold on a commercial basis to fund the development of the charity's main objectives, realised through a monastic community".

Oddly enough, one of those main objectives is "the education of children and young persons in the Roman Catholic faith".

RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Sins of emission



FIGURES for radioactive waste from a Cardiff factory went conveniently missing when environmental consultant Hugh Richards first asked for them while compiling his recently published report which suggests a link with infant mortality rates in the area.

Nycomed Amersham, which makes radioactive isotopes for medical purposes, denies that emissions of radioactive tritium from its base at Whitchurch in Cardiff pose any threat to infant health.

In 1994 the then Amersham International published a Justification of Disposals; but this only gave figures for emissions dating back to 1986, although the company has been operating in Cardiff since 1980.

In March 1995 Richards asked Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution (HMIP), at the time responsible for overseeing environmental issues in Wales, for the discharge figures for 1980 to 1985. Radioactivity is measured in becquerels (Bq), and when he was given these figures (in terabecquerels), over the telephone, they revealed a massive peak in 1985: soaring to 770TBq from 1.7TBq in 1980. The chart provided by Amersham gave the figure for 1986 as 220TBq.

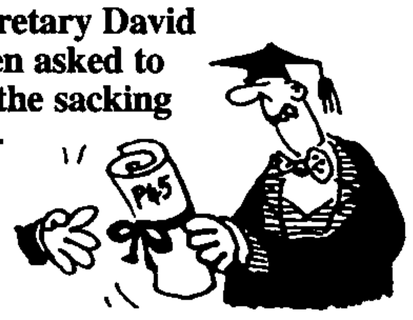
In August 1995 HMIP supplied Richards with monthly data supplied in retrospect, along with an explanation from pollution inspector David Bennett saying: "The missing information for the years 1979-1985 was in a single file. I do not know what happened to this file, but it is not unknown for files to be misplaced in the wrong drawer or cabinet, only to reappear at a later date."

The new data showed massive discrepancies with the figures Richards had been given over the phone five months earlier — discharges of 240TBq in 1985 in the August figures compared to 770 in March. Richards queried the huge difference and received an apology from Bennett who claimed: "The cause of the discrepancy is an error in compiling the annual discharges for the years 1981-5 (these were provided to you by telephone on 21 March 1995)."

The new figures were bound to be right, however, as they had been provided by none other than the company in question, Amersham.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

Ratford upon Avon?



EDUCATION secretary David Blunkett has been asked to call an inquiry into the sacking of two disabled vice-principals at Stratford College in Warwickshire.

Last month the college was forced to pay out what is rumoured to be one of the largest redundancy settlements ever in further education after principal Nigel Briggs fired the two men and said he would take on their work himself.

In March last year John Holland, head of performing arts and media, informed college governors that he had been told to register as blind. He had been progressively losing his sight over a number of years due to a hereditary disease.

A month later he and fellow vice-principal Dermot Shiels, head of hospitality and catering, were told by Briggs that he was reducing the number of vice-principals from four to two and that their services would no longer be required. Mr Shiels is recovering from cancer and still suffering the side-effects of radiotherapy.

In the months that followed the two men tried to appeal against their dismissal on the grounds that the two remaining vice-principals' posts were effectively new and should therefore be openly advertised. They felt they would have a good chance of success themselves as their respective departments had been heaped with praise in the last Further Education Funding Council inspection.

But then in July last year Shiels, who has 23 years' experience in the sector, and Holland, who had worked at Stratford College for 15 years, were called into the principal's office and told they had to go. As a reward for their services they were each presented with a bin liner and a cardboard box and told they had 15 minutes to leave the premises.

Principal Briggs was on holiday when the *Eye* tried to contact him. But when asked by the Stratford Herald why he had only given the men 15 minutes to clear their desks Briggs said: "I think in fairness to the two gentlemen I won't answer that question."

● HIGH Principals was interested to hear about the new efficiency drive by Wigan and Leigh College principal Margaret Murdin, which will involve merging the college's libraries.

Under the ingenious cost-cutting scheme, chief librarian Mark Lawley has been asked to take a 50 percent pay cut while taking on the extra work involved in the merger.

One of the libraries involved will be the Crawford library, which has became something of a symbol of sleaze in the sector. It was named after Murdin's close friend Ken Crawford, former convict and chair of education at Wigan council.

After being put away for fraud, he was largely rehabilitated through the FE college, which generously bought the services of a training company he set up. Crawford has since died, but not before seeing his friend Mrs Murdin rise to become principal of the college, from which position she appointed his son and heir, Nick Crawford, as vice-principal and director of finance.

It is this kind of behaviour that has fuelled a long dispute between staff and managers at Wigan and Leigh, where lecturers have passed a vote of no confidence in the management.

Earlier this year union officials finally thought they had made progress when they secured a meeting with the minister responsible for further education, George Mudie. The MP for Leeds East was rightly horrified that the Wigan principal had ripped up an agreement with the union to set up an independent appeals panel in the event of redundancies. (Murdin argued that the agreement was no longer valid because it was struck with a director of human resources who had subsequently left the college.)

Lecturers had great hopes for Mudie, who promised immediate action. Unfortunately he was sacked in Tony Blair's summer non-reshuffle. His successor Malcolm Wicks, much praised as chair of the Commons education select committee, would do well to look into about the library merger at Wigan. He may like to ask why Murdin's efficiency drive does not extend to the numerous foreign trips taken by senior managers to Wigan's growing empire of franchises around the world.

● ISSUE 36 of *Barnsley College News* told its readers that the investigation into allegations made by a whistleblower about the financial dealing of principal David Eade were now at an end.

The allegations concerned a £21,000 loan to a surfing magazine run by Eade's former step-children. The loan was made by Progress Training Ltd, a Barnsley College company of which Eade is the director and which makes much of its money from services provided to the college.

Clerk to the college corporation Ann Oldroyd wrote on 9 July: "The college has met to consider the results of the investigation and found the allegations to be unsubstantiated. The College Corporation has decided to take no further action."

Strange then that on 3 August the Further Education Funding Council issued the following statement: "We have received a number of anonymous allegations regarding Barnsley College. As with all allegations of this nature, we are investigating this matter in cooperation with the college governing body. At this point, the Council is in regular contact with the college and is satisfied that the governors are taking the investigations seriously. Should any further concerns arise, the Council will obviously take the necessary action."

The government is planning to abolish the FEFC, recognising that it is absurd to have the same quango responsible for regulating, inspecting and funding colleges. This absurdity is well illustrated by the case of Barnsley, which faces inspection in the autumn. The investigation will presumably be referred to the council of the FEFC, whose members include none other than David Eade himself.

Eade, who is taking the *Eye* to the Press Complaints Commission over previous articles, is now one of only four college principals who earn more than £100,000 a year. Only the principal of Birmingham College of Food and Technology earns more. The latest edition of Labour Research shows that between 1997 and 1998, Eade's salary rose by 22 percent to £107,596. A note explains that this includes a bonus payment for his performance during the 1996-7 academic year — the period the loan was made.

In the City

WHILE news is still awaited of the 1998 financial health bulletins from Mohamed Fayed's Harrods flagship and its parent company, the results are in on two consistently loss-making parts of the phoney pharaoh's empire. And with these latest figures comes news of more borrowings and an offshore reshuffle raising questions over the future of *Punch* magazine, which continues to lose money on a grand scale.

For the 30 weeks to end-August last year, the biggest joke in *Punch* was that it cost £3 to earn every £1 in sales, such as they are, of the Fayed organ. The *Punch* company had revenues of just £203,000 against sales costs of almost £600,000. Add on administrative costs plus interest, and the loss was £2m — or £66,000 a week! After three years losses now total almost £14m.

Although the loss was much reduced from the previous full year — £4.6m — due to much lower sales and administration costs, the magazine is still going downhill at speed. Revenues from each issue have more than halved to merely £6,700. This may suggest why *Punch*'s creditors were waiting longer to be paid — 33 days on average last year against a previous 27 days. Not surprisingly auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers admitted in April: "The company has continued to make losses."

All of which may help explain an unannounced switch in the ownership of the Fayed mouthpiece. Since last August *Punch* has ceased to be owned by the Fayed master company Harrods Holdings, which sold/transferred the owner of *Punch*, Liberty Publishing & Media, to a new Jersey company, Liberty Holdings. This is controlled by Mohamed Fayed personally, and not the Fayed family which controls Harrods via a Bermuda partnership involving his two brothers Ali and Salah. After pumping in £10m perhaps they no longer agree with financing their elder brother's folly?

So now *Punch*'s survival will have to rely on its chairman's notoriously fickle whim. However, creditors and employees — who are no longer members of the Harrods pension scheme — can be somewhat reassured by the fact that through Liberty Holdings he has indicated to the auditors his intention to continue to bankroll the company "for at least the next 12 months". But what happens after next April?

Over in Paris the Ritz hotel continues to lose money and the pharaoh continues to borrow against it. In February Fayed repaid a four-year FF175m (£17.5m) loan from Swiss Bank Corporation due last month and borrowed FF550m (£55m) from DePfa Deutsche Pfandbriebank in Germany.

Fayed was able to do this as a result of obtaining the freehold on two Paris properties adjacent to the Ritz in Place Vendome. This will reduce the company's rent bill but at the cost of much higher interest charges.

Helped perhaps by publicity surrounding the death of Princess Diana two years ago, the Ritz saw revenues and occupancy rates rise. But the hotel is still unprofitable — as it has been since Fayed bought it 20 years ago, racking up losses of more than £135m. Helped by a licensing payment the Ritz company managed to break even before interest charges. Stripping out the one-off licensing payment, the company lost some FF4m (£400,000) after interest, but that was still a big improvement on 1997 when the loss was FF20m (£2m).

The question now is whether the hotel will be able to finally make a profit given the much increased cost of Fayed's borrowings. Once again — as with Harrods — Fayed appears to be rolling forward an ever growing ball of debt with no apparent capacity to repay other than by ever larger financings or a sale.

THE Serious Farce Office is rumoured to be facing the kind of IT computerisation problems which have beset the Passport Office, the Inland Revenue, the department of social security and other agencies.

DOCMAN, designed by IBM at an estimated cost of £15m to revolutionise the handling of documents and information for SFO investigations and prosecutions, is said to be in trouble after less than a year of trials.

In its latest annual report last month the SFO admitted to "technical and design problems" with the much vaunted DOCMAN system but insisted these "have been largely overcome". However, other sources close to the SFO are less convinced and wonder if DOCMAN will ever perform as promised.

IBM was awarded the seven-year DOCMAN contract as yet another private finance initiative (PFI) — this time under "new" Labour — in January 1998. The plan was to produce a new image-based document management system which would copy, store and index the thousands of documents required by the SFO during investigations and trials. The system was to be financed out of projected cost savings and improved efficiency — the mantra always repeated when justifying costly new IT projects.

Just how ambitious are the targets set for DOCMAN, which IBM is to both design and run, was made clear in last year's SFO report on the electronic document and information scanning and management system. It would further speed up investigations and prosecutions and improve their quality by enabling investigators to "search vast amounts of material and cross-check it in seconds". Furthermore, preparing and disclosing evidence for trials "at present highly labour intensive will be considerably more efficient".

IBM was also to put in place a scanning bureau capable of handling 20,000 pages a day plus printing documents for court and upgrading the SFO's existing IT system. But almost a year since DOCMAN began to be tested these all seem faraway promises to some of those using the system which has yet to be tested on a real case. The taxpayer had better hope DOCMAN does not come to justify the SFO's nickname.

REPERCUSSIONS from the inept City police handling of the June 18 riot, otherwise known as the carnival against global capitalism, rumble ever louder, especially inside the small force itself where one senior officer was awarded an unjustified white feather by certain unkind colleagues over his failure to be on duty that day.

The manifest failure of the City Police to respond in particular to the attempts to sack the LIFFE building could turn out to be very costly to both the City Corporation and the City police's own future.

Damages caused to the LIFFE building are estimated to exceed £1m. Damage to a McDonald's burger bar and other properties could take the bill to

"I think I make a pretty good team!"

£2m. Assuming what happened is classed as a riot — hard to argue against given the violent attacks on the LIFFE building over three hours — then the corporation normally would be able to claim on its insurance policy.

But after reading the internal and independent reports commissioned into the affair, the insurers may well decide that City police failures were such as to amount to contributory negligence and suggest the corporation is fully liable.

Certainly the inability or unwillingness of the City police, who had up to 1,000 officers available including those from the Metropolitan police, to lift the LIFFE siege takes a lot of explaining any other way.

It appears that undercover police officers near the LIFFE building reported the possibility of a problem before it erupted. But no action was taken. Then, when the rioters began attacking the building, the new and vaunted City police communications control centre (glowingly featured in the latest annual report) was incapable of handling or responding to the 999 calls for help or calls from its own outnumbered officers.

Police officers sat fuming in the canteen and in vans hearing radio messages reporting there was a riot going on but received no orders to take action. Others report the command and control capacity appeared to be paralysed while police officers were attacked and one woman officer was lucky to escape serious injury.

The reports blame the inexperience of those officers in charge but make no reference to the absence on leave of certain of their superiors. Why leave was not banned is also not addressed given that the date of the carnival was well known.

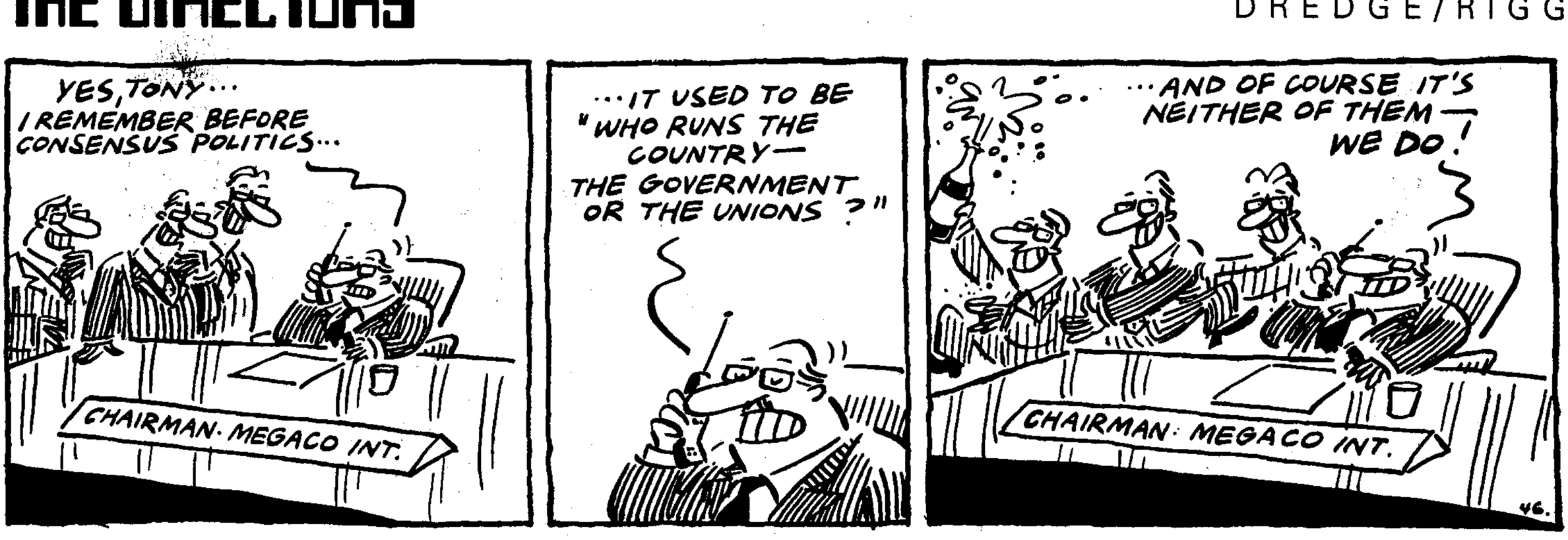
Junior officers also wonder why there is no criticism of the man in overall charge on that day (Gold Control in police speak) — assistant commissioner James Hart. But then it would be hard to blame Hart and not name and blame those officers he relied upon who might feel that was also unfair if those who were absent also missed out on their share. As a result not a single named officer is criticised.

The carnival may not end global capitalism but it could end the independence of the City police. The home office may view the failure to prevent the LIFFE siege and the internal inadequacies this revealed as the final justification for a merger with the Met.

Meanwhile the City will be reassured to know that a new high priority for its crimestoppers is locating swan feathers for ceremonial hats to be worn at the next lord mayor's day parade!

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE/RIGG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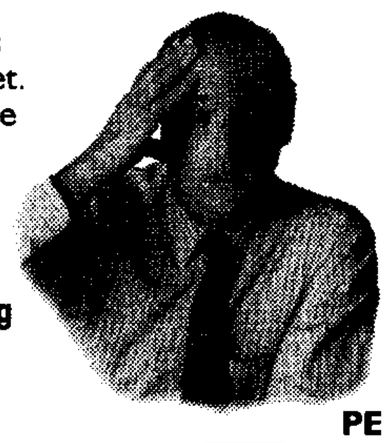

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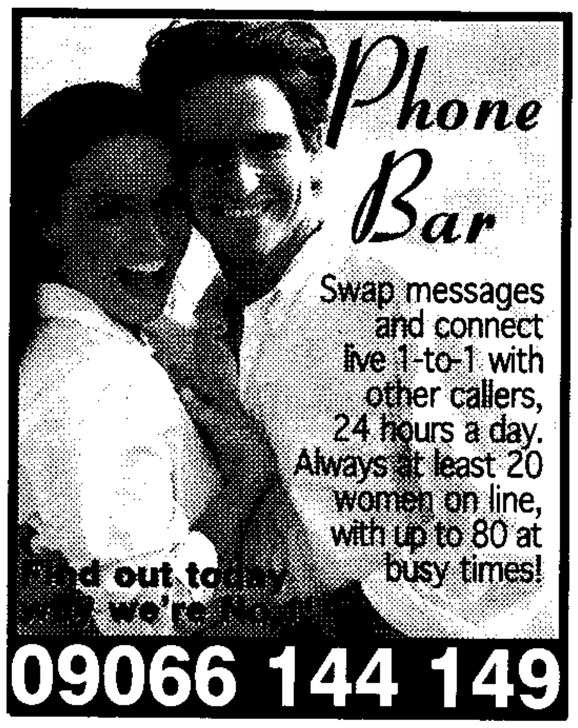

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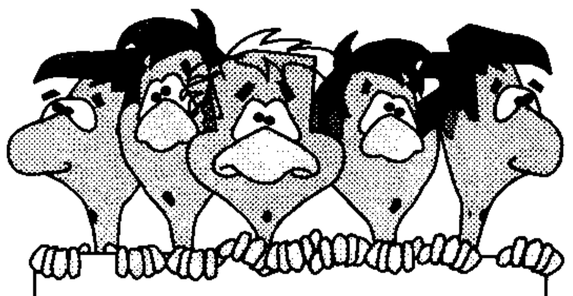

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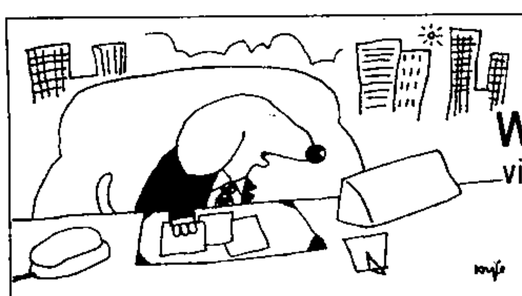

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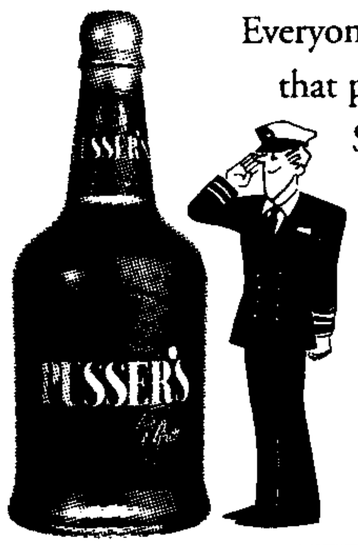

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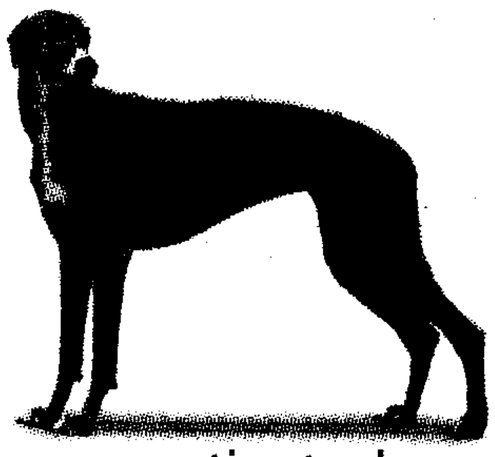

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